NATION

Indore residents shun taps, turn to bottled water

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

Transport Canada warns AI over crew drinking rules

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

India squad for NZ ODI series: Gill back as captain

≫ Page: 8 ≪

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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US bombs Venezuela, 'kidnaps' President

Venezuela declares emergency as US says Maduro, his wife to face trial in NY over 'drug terror'

CARACAS, 3 DEC

The United States has captured Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and flown him out of the country following a brief but intense overnight military operation, triggering a national emergency in Venezuela.

US President Donald Trump confirmed that Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores (in pic), were seized early on Saturday during what he described as a "lightning" operation involving US military and law-enforcement forces. The couple were removed from their home inside the Ft. Tiuna military complex in Caracas and transferred to the US warship USS Iwo Jima, from where they are being taken to New York to face criminal charges.

US Attorney General Pam Bondi said the pair had been indicted in New York and would "soon face the full wrath of American justice on American soil in American courts".

A SHORT, VIOLENT OPERATION

The strike lasted less than 30 minutes. At least seven explosions were reported across Caracas as low-flying aircraft passed over the capital. Smoke was seen rising from military facilities, parts of the city lost power, and videos verified by the Associated Press showed tracer fire and explosions illuminating the night sky.

Trump said one US helicopter was hit but recovered, and that several US personnel were injured but none killed. He said some Venezuelan civilians and military personnel were killed, though no figures were confirmed. Venezuelan Vice President Delcy Rodríguez also reported casualties but gave no numbers. "We had to do it because it's a war," Trump said in an interview with Fox News, adding that the operation was carried out "successfully".

Venezuela's government condemned the action as an "imperialist attack" on civilian and military installations and declared a state of emergency. Rodríguez demanded proof that Maduro and Flores were alive and said all national defence plans had been activated.

Under Venezuelan law, Rodríguez should assume power, though there was no confirmation that she had formally done so. Armed civilians and members of a pro-government militia appeared in parts of Caracas, while other neighbourhoods remained largely deserted. At pro-Maduro demonstrations, crowds chanted for the president's return.

The operation followed months of escalating US pressure on Caracas. Washington maintains that Maduro is not Venezuela's legitimate leader and accuses his government of operating as a criminal enterprise linked to drug trafficking and terrorist groups.

The Trump administration has acknowledged repeated US strikes on boats in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean alleged to be smuggling drugs, as well as a CIA-linked drone strike last week on a Venezuelan docking facility. Maduro has repeatedly denounced the operations as a pretext to remove him from power. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 5, 6

Estimated at **303** billion barrels, Venezuela is home to the largest known reserves of oil.

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, were captured from their home in Caracas and transferred to the US warship USS Iwo Jima, as structures burned amid US strikes ***PHOTO: WHITE HOUSE***

We (the US) have the greatest oil companies in the world, the biggest, the greatest, and we're going to be very much involved in it
-Donald Trump, US President on Venezuela's oil industry

Maduro and his wife were at their home in Ft Tiuna military installation. And, there, they (US)carried out what we could call a kidnapping of the president -Venezuela

SC to deliver verdict on Umar bail plea on 5 Jan

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

The Supreme Court will pronounce its verdict on 5 January on the bail pleas of activists Umar Khalid, Sharjeel Imam and others accused in the 2020 Delhi riots conspiracy case. A bench of Justices Aravind Kumar and NV Anjaria had reserved its order on 10 December after hearing arguments from the Delhi Police and counsel for the accused. The activists are charged under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and IPC provisions, accused of being key conspirators in the February 2020 riots that killed 53 people and injured over 700 in north-east Delhi during protests against the CAA and NRC. *—PTI*

PM inaugurates Exhibition of Buddha relics

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday inaugurated an exhibition of sacred gems and bone fragments linked to the Buddha, saying they were not merely artefacts but part of India's revered heritage. Speaking at the launch of The Light and the Lotus: Relics of the Awakened One in south Delhi, he said the Piprahwa Relics had inspired deep faith when displayed in countries with large Buddhist populations, including Vietnam, Thailand and Russia. Modi noted that the relics returned to India after more than 125 years after efforts by the government and the Godrej Group halted an auction in Hong Kong. *—PTI*

Will cut off hands: AIMIM leader on hijab row

JALNA, 3 JAN

AIMIM leader Imtiaz Jaleel on Friday courted controversy after saying he would "cut off the hand" of anyone who touched Muslim women with ill intent, amid a row over remarks linked to the hijab incident involving Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. Addressing a rally in Jalna, Maharashtra, the former Aurangabad MP criticised "so-called secular parties", accusing them of supporting criminals while denying Muslims proper representation. He also targeted Nitish Kumar over the hijab controversy. The row followed a comment by Uttar Pradesh minister Sanjay Nishad, who questioned what could have happened if Nitish Kumar had "touched somewhere else". *—PTI*

104 hospitalised in Gandhinagar after typhoid outbreak

GANDHINAGAR, 3 JAN

Gujarat Deputy Chief Minister Harsh Sanghavi on Saturday reviewed the situation at Gandhinagar Civil Hospital, where 104 patients, including children, were admitted with suspected typhoid. Officials said cases have surged over the past three days. A team of 22 doctors has been deployed, informed Union Home Minister Amit Shah . Civil Hospital Medical Superintendent Dr. Mita Parikh said several people from Sectors 24–28 and Adivada in Gandhinagar, were admitted in stable condition. Water samples from these areas indicated the drinking water was unsafe, she added. Officials said the Municipal Corporation has begun a door-to-door survey and is distributing chlorine tablets. *—PTI*

Another Hindu man dies in B'desh

DHAKA/NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

A Hindu businessman, who was brutally attacked three days ago in Shariatpur district of Bangladesh, died on Saturday, sparking renewed concerns over rising violence against minority communities. Khokon Chandra Das, 50, was assaulted while returning home after closing his shop.

Das, who ran a medicine shop and mobile banking business, was travelling in an autorickshaw when attackers intercepted the vehicle. He was beaten, hacked with sharp weapons, and set on fire after petrol was poured over him, according to media reports. In a bid to save himself, Das jumped into a roadside pond, after which locals rescued him. Initially treated at a local hospital, he was later referred to Dhaka due to the severity of his injuries. Doctors reported multiple wounds across his body and burn injuries on his face, head, and hands.

"This is the fifth death of a Hindu man in one month. Seven attacks have been recorded on the community," said Kajol Debnath, spokesman for the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, warning that radical groups may be trying to intimidate minorities. Recent incidents include the lynching of 25-year-old Dipu Chandra Das over alleged blasphemy in Mymensingh, an attack on the homes of expatriate workers Shukh Shil and Anil Shil in Chattogram. Political observers note a spike in mob violence and clandestine attacks against minorities in recent weeks. Over the past year, several Sufi shrines of liberal Muslim saints have also been desecrated. *—PTI*

Pak backs China's mediation claim during Op Sindoor

ISLAMABAD, 3 JAN

Pakistan on Thursday backed China's claim that it played a role in easing tensions with India during Operation Sindoor, describing Beijing's outreach as "diplomacy for peace" within broader international efforts.

Foreign Office spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said China remained in constant contact with Pakistan's leadership and "had made certain contacts with the Indian leadership as well" between 6 and 10 May. "Those contacts, characterised by a very positive diplomatic exchange, contributed in bringing down temperatures and bringing peace and security in the region," he said, adding that China's characterisation of mediation was "correct".

India has consistently rejected any third-party role, maintaining that the May 2025 standoff was resolved through direct talks between the Directors General of Military Operations of both countries. New Delhi has also reiterated that bilateral issues with Pakistan do not permit external intervention.

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi earlier said Beijing had mediated several global hotspots in 2025, including India-Pakistan tensions. India launched Operation Sindoor on 7 May, targeting terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir after the Pahalgam attack killed 26 civilians. Four days of military exchanges followed before both sides agreed to halt actions on 10 May.

Separately, Pakistan criticised External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's remarks on "bad neighbours", accusing India of deflecting attention from its own "troubling record" of regional instability. Andrabi said Pakistan rejected the comments and warned India. *—PTI*

Pak PM Shehbaz Sharif and Chinese Prez Xi Jinping ***PHOTO: PTI***

Pak tests indigenous Taimoor missile with 600km range

ISLAMABAD, 3 JAN

Pakistan Air Force on Saturday successfully conducted a flight test of the indigenously developed Taimoor air-launched cruise missile, capable of striking land and sea targets up to 600km away.

In a statement issued from Rawalpindi, the military said the test marked a major milestone in advancing the country's aerospace and defence capabilities. "Taimoor Air-Launched Cruise Missile is capable of engaging enemy land and sea targets with high precision at a range of 600kilometres, carrying a conventional warhead," it said.

Equipped with an advanced navigation and guidance system, the missile is designed to fly at very low altitudes, enabling it to evade hostile air and missile defence systems. The precision-strike capability is expected to enhance Pakistan Air Force's conventional deterrence and operational flexibility. The army said the successful test reflected the technical maturity, innovation and self-reliance of Pakistan's defence industry. *—PTI*

2nd most wanted Maoist leader Badse surrenders

HYDERABAD, 3 JAN

High-ranking CPI (Maoist) commander Badse Sukka alias Deva and 19 underground cadres surrendered to the Telangana Police, official sources said on Saturday. A contemporary of Madavi Hiduma, Badse is the second most important tribal leader in the CPI (Maoist) party.

The surrender sounded the death knell for the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) and the Telangana State Committee of the CPI (Maoist).

The group turned over the PLGA's 'arms dumps,' including those linked to Hiduma and Badse, a police release said.

Senior leader Kankanala Raji Reddy alias Venkatesh also surrendered. Badse was a ruthless strategist and was behind several attacks, including the 2013 Jhiram Ghati ambush in which former Chhattisgarh Minister Mahendra Karma and other INC leaders were killed. He had a reward of Rs 75 lakh on his head. Raji Reddy played a key role in establishing a guerrilla base on Karreguttalu (Chhattisgarh-Telangana border). The 20 Maoists who surrendered will be given Rs 1.82 crore. *—PTI*

Karnataka weighs tighter gun laws after Ballari clash

BENGALURU, 3 JAN

The Karnataka government is considering stricter norms for granting licences to possess private firearms following the violent clashes in Ballari, Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar said on Saturday. He said the State would also raise concerns with the Centre over the misuse of privately owned guns, describing the incident as the second of its kind. A Congress worker was shot dead during clashes between supporters of the two MLAs over a flex banner for a Valmiki statue unveiling. Home Minister G Parameshwara said preliminary reports suggested the fatal bullet was fired from a private revolver, not police weapons, and that ballistic tests would be conducted on all seized firearms. *—Salar News*

>>>More on Page 2

PHOTO: FREEPIK

POLITICS HITS IPL

KKR drops Mustafizur after BCCI diktat amid Indo-B'desh tension

GUWAHATI, 3 JAN

Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman has been dropped by IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders after being told to do so by the Indian Cricket Board (BCCI) amid heightening diplomatic tensions.

KKR had acquired the 30-year-old left-armer for Rs 9.20 crore from a base price of Rs 2 crore after an intense bidding war with Chennai Super Kings and Delhi Capitals last month.

The BCCI said KKR will be allowed to name a replacement if required for the event scheduled to start on 26 March.

"The BCCI has asked Kolkata Knight Riders to drop Mustafizur Rahman. They can ask for a replacement and the BCCI will allow it," BCCI Secretary Devajit Saikia said here on Saturday.

In a statement, the franchise said it has dropped the player as told by the BCCI.

The pressure had been mounting on the BCCI over Rahman's participation after the recent killing of a Hindu in Bangladesh and India"s expression of concern for the safety of minorities there. The criticism has also extended to KKR co-owner and Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan with some politicians from the BJP questioning the move to hire the bowler. Rahman has played in eight IPL editions since 2016, missing the tournament only in 2019 and 2020. He has played for Sunrisers Hyderabad, Mumbai Indians, Delhi Capitals, Chennai Super Kings and Rajasthan Royals. The upcoming edition was going to be his first for KKR. Neither Rahman nor the Bangladesh Cricket Board have reacted to the development. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 8

1/3RD OF ARAVALLI UNDER RISK: STUDY REFUTES CENTRE'S 0.19% CLAIM

JAIPUR, 3 JAN

A people-led conservation collective, 'We Are Aravalli,' released a satellite audit on Saturday claiming that nearly one-third of the Aravalli range is endangered, and demanded a ban on mining across the region.

The collective said a forensic analysis using satellite data and the Bristol FABDEM bare-earth model found that 31.8 per cent of the Aravalli Hills area is less than 100 metres in height, making it vulnerable to loss of legal protection.

The group said the government's assessment of the affected area at 0.19 per cent does not reflect reality.

Environment activist Dr Sudhanshu said the findings highlight a serious policy gap.

"Low-elevation hills are wrongly dismissed as wasteland. Scientifically, these ridges are critical groundwater recharge zones and natural dust barriers. Removing their protection will accelerate desertification," he said,

The collective said the threatened zones play a crucial role in water security and air quality for nearly 300 million people across Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi. It warned that mining could increase expansion of the Thar desert, reduce groundwater recharge for cities like Jaipur and Gurugram, and increase pollution in Delhi-NCR. *—PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Two arrested for misbehaving with cops on New Year

BENGALURU, 3 JAN

The police have arrested two New Year revellers for allegedly misbehaving with police personnel on duty. The accused have been identified as Ansh Mehta and Parv Rathi, both aged 22, residents of Chennai, the police said on Saturday. Both the accused were intoxicated at the time of the incident. Ravi K, attached to Vidhan Soudha Police Station, in his complaint stated that he was on patrolling duty on 1 January, at around 1.40am near the Indian Express Building. Four women were waiting for a cab when the two men came and allegedly misbehaved with them. When the police personnel asked them to leave, they tore his reflector jacket and assaulted him, obstructing his duty. When brought to the police station, they misbehaved with the police personnel and the investigation officer, he said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: SALAR

DGP (Prisons) inspects jail after viral video

KALABURAGI, 3 JAN

Director General of Police for Prisons and Correctional Services, Alok Kumar conducted an extensive inspection at Kalaburagi Central Prison after a video showing inmates engaging in revelry went viral on social media recently. He noted that no major lapses were observed during his inspection, although some complaints were probed. "If anyone has deliberately committed such acts, strict action will be taken. Any fault on the part of our officials will also be addressed," Kumar said. The visit lasted nearly four and a half hours and included questioning prisoners, meeting officials, and inspecting the prison's premises. Kumar said an inquiry into the incident is being led by Anand Reddy, with a report expected by 20 January. *—Salar News*

AIDSO condemns honour killings, school closures

MYSURU, 3 JAN

All India Democratic Students Organization (AIDSO) district units on Saturday observed 'Resistance Day' against honor killings, condemning increasing violence on women on the birth anniversary of Savitribai Phule at an event at Kukkarahalli Lake Park, Manuvana Park, and the Oval Grounds in Mysuru. The protesters called upon people to put an end to "honour" killings seeking to put an end to such inhumane killings. He also strongly opposed the closure of 40,000 government schools in the state under the 'KPS Magnet' scheme. District Secretary Nitin recalled the contributions of Savithra Bai Phule who waged a long battle for equal rights for women. District Vice President Swathi, and office-bearers were present. *—Salar News*

Wild elephants spotted near Belagavi villages

BELAGAVI, 3 JAN

The forest department has issued an urgent advisory to residents of villages along the Khanapur-Belagavi taluk border following the movement of wild elephants in the region. Elephants have been sighted in Dharoli, Kabanali, Neelavade, Mughavade, Amboli, Bhandekarawada, Bakanur, Belavatti, Bailur, Kusamalli, Kiniye, Habbanatti and Devachihatti. Their movement is reported to be highest between 6pm and 8am. Residents are urged not to venture alone into forest fringes or fields during these hours. People have been warned against shouting, throwing stones or using mobile flashlights, as such acts may provoke attacks. *—Salar News*

Scrap G RAM G, bring back MGNREGA, says CM

'Rights of poor under rural-employment scheme at stake'

BENGALURU, 3 JAN

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah demanded that the Centre scraped the new VB-G RAM G act and bring back the UPA-era MGNREGA that "gave right to jobs to poor, vulnerable, women and small farmers".

He alleged that the new Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Act took away the right to livelihood, the powers of panchayats, and put an additional burden on the finances of States.

"In the new VB-G RAM G Act, the government will notify in which Gram Panchayat the work should be taken," Siddaramaiah told reporters.

He said both the Congress party and the State government will take up the issue simultaneously and asserted, "The Congress along with the public, labourers and all like-minded will fight until the VB-G RAM G Act is withdrawn, like it was done in case of farm laws".

On the impact of the new legislation, Siddaramaiah said, "The Modi government has done three things with the VB-G RAM G Act. It has taken away the right to livelihood of the vulnerable sections of the society, particularly women, poor and small farmers. It has taken away the powers of Panchayat, and it has also added additional financial burden to the States without any consultation."

"They have not consulted the people either. In a way they have shown a dictatorial behaviour" he said, adding that the demand-based scheme has now been made supply based, in terms of providing jobs.

Siddaramaiah claimed that the Modi government by repealing Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has systematically weakened village-level governance and damaged the rural economy.

The CM said, under the earlier Act, employment was guaranteed locally, enabling rural asset creation and strengthening village economies. Workers had a legal right to demand employment for at least 100 days a year.

"We also urge to restore people's right to work, and restore the rights of panchayats to self-govern," he said.

The CM said there will be additional financial burden of approximately Rs 3,000 crore per year on Karnataka, with the new legislation.

Deputy CM DK Shivakumar said from panchayat level, MGNREGA workers and leaders across party lines will be called for conventions, and Grama Sabhas will be held against the central government's move. It will also be held at the taluk, district and state level. *—PTI*

> **Mahatma Gandhi was killed by Godse the first time. This government is killing him for the second time. They should not have this much vengeance**
>
> —Siddaramaiah, Chief Minister

Why is the Congress against G Ram G?

- MGNREGA guaranteed work throughout the year, but G Ram G has a 60-day work ban "during peak agricultural season".
- Demand-driven MGNREGA is turned into supply-driven G Ram G, meaning Centre dictates when people can work.
- G Ram G splits the financial burden 60:40 between the Centre-State, burdening States.
- Centre decides which panchayats can allocate work, diminishing the right to work.
- Contractors were banned under MGNREGA, but are not under G Ram G, meaning workers may be assigned to Central infrastructure projects.

71.18 lakh

MGNREGA workers, including 36.75 lakh women, accounted for 51.6 percent of the workforce in Karnataka.

DKS: Won't allow 'Republic of Ballari'

BENGALURU, 3 JAN

Backing Congress MLA Nara Bharath Reddy in connection with the violent clash in Ballari, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Saturday said the government would not allow BJP MLA G Janardhan Reddy to establish his so-called "Republic of Ballari" once again.

A Congress worker was shot dead in the clash between supporters of Janardhan and Bharath over putting up a flex banner for a Valmiki statue unveiling on Thursday.

Janardhan, who had been barred from entering Ballari, Anantapur and Kurnool districts following his arrest by the CBI in September 2011 in connection with illegal mining cases, returned to his hometown of Ballari in 2024 after the Supreme Court lifted the ban.

The alleged rule of the iron ore mafia under Janardhan's command in the mineral-rich district is referred to as the 'Republic of Ballari' by his opponents.

Shivakumar said that Janardhan, unable to digest the Congress' rise in Ballari had reunited with former minister and BJP leader B Sriramulu.

"Let them come together, but they know, and we know what exists internally between them..... As a political party... we will not let them establish their 'Republic of Ballari'," he said.

'CAN'T STOP PUTTING POSTERS'

Shivakumar said that Janardhan and his supporters had no right to object to posters being placed in front of his home.

"The road in front of your house is government property, and the poster was put up there. What conspiracy was there?" the KPCC President said.

"Sometimes, BJP workers put posters in front of my house too in Bengaluru. Can I say 'don't do it'? They do it even in front of the CM's residence," he added. "We have lost a party worker.... and the BJP is responsible for it".

'NO THREAT TO JANARDHAN'S LIFE'

Shivakumar dismissed Janardhan's claim that there was a threat to his life.

"He is a drama master. He is a film producer anyway. Who will attempt to kill someone who lives like a fortress with security around him?" Shivakumar quipped.

He added that a team of five party leaders will visit Ballari to probe the violence. *—PTI*

> **There was no violence until Janardhan Reddy was allowed into Ballari. He doesn't have any right to talk about the violence.**
>
> —DK Shivakumar, Deputy Chief Minister

21-year-old man arrested for 'molesting' doctor in City

BENGALURU, 3 JAN

A 21-year-old man was arrested for allegedly molesting a doctor while she was returning to her paying guest accommodation after duty last month, police said on Saturday.

The accused has been identified as Rakesh, they said.

The incident occurred on the night of 16-17 December in AGB Layout under Soladevanahalli police station jurisdiction, police said.

Police said the 28-year-old doctor was returning to her residence after duty at a hospital here at around 12.40 am, when the suspect arrived on a two-wheeler and stopped near her. He allegedly asked her about a bus stop and then got down from the vehicle.

Police said the man allegedly behaved indecently with the woman and started touching her inappropriately. When she raised an alarm, he fled on his scooter.

Based on her complaint, a case was registered at Soladevanahalli police station under Section 74 (Assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, a senior police officer said.

After analysing the CCTV footage of the incident, the suspect was identified and was promptly apprehended, he added. *— PTI*

K'taka records highest ever organ donations

BENGALURU, 3 JAN

Karnataka has recorded its highest-ever organ donation figures with 198 donations in 2025, setting a new milestone in the State's transplant history, officials said on Saturday.

This has surpassed the previous record registered in 2023, when the state reported 178 organ donations, they said.

According to the health department, with this achievement, Karnataka has secured the third position nationally in organ donations for 2025, setting a milestone for the State Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (SOTTO).

Among the States, Tamil Nadu topped the chart with 267 organ donations, followed by Telangana with 205. Karnataka stood third with 198 donations, while Maharashtra and Gujarat reported 153 and 152 donations respectively, according to official data.

Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao, spearheading the 'Jeevasarthakathe' organ donation movement, termed it as a "proud moment". *—PTI*

Allot houses to Kannadigas, not B'deshis: Ashoka

BENGALURU, 3 JAN

Opposition Leader R Ashoka demanded that Kannadigas should be given priority in house allocations under the Rajiv Gandhi Housing Corporation Scheme (RGHCS) instead of "Bangla people".

Ashoka said the Opposition will protest the allocations on 5 January. "Thousands of Kannadigas have applied for houses. However, the Congress government is giving houses to Bangla residents at Kogilu Cross. We will protest against this".

He asserted that genealogy should be mandatory in housing allocation.

"Around 65,000 people from the State have applied for houses to the RGHCS. About 7,000 houses have been built by the corporation. Another 10,000 houses are under construction. An 80-year-old woman has paid the full amount, but she has not been given a house," Ashoka said. "Even though 13,000 people lost their homes due to floods, they have not been given houses. MLAs from North Karnataka are coming here and asking for houses on behalf of flood victims."

He claimed that the Congress illegally provided Aadhaar cards to Kogilu residents and said that West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee was releasing Bangla infiltrators. *— ANI*

STREETS ARE NEVER QUIET

ASHA workers protest at Freedom Park on Saturday, demanding that the State government implement a minimum monthly honorarium of Rs 10,000, as promised a year ago *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Police detain ABVP members as they attempt to approach the Vice-Chancellor of Bengaluru University during a protest over an alleged exam paper leak, in City on Saturday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

MLA's son allegedly assaults Belagavi Union head

BELAGAVI, 3 JAN

- DCC Bank Labour Union head Karennavar alleged that Congress MLA Savadi's son assaulted him when they were meeting to discuss differences

Ningappa Karennavar, President of the District Central Cooperative (DCC) Bank Labour Union, has alleged that he was assaulted by Chidanand Savadi, son of former minister and Athani Congress MLA Laxman Savadi, at his residence in Athani, Belagavi district on Saturday.

Karennavar said he had been invited to Savadi's home to discuss differences over a union matter but was allegedly attacked without the chance to talk, sustaining injuries to his head.

In a video statement, he described Savadi as an influential figure and expressed fears that no action would be taken against him. He warned that he could be driven to suicide if the government failed to provide protection.

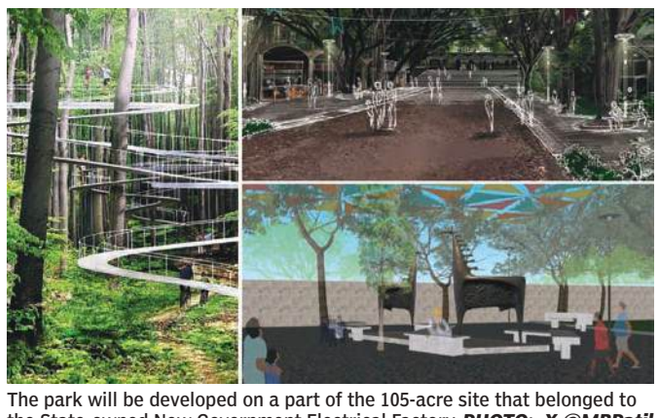
Responding to the allegations, Laxman Savadi denied any physical assault, saying Karennavar had approached him over a union issue, which he advised should be resolved internally. He added that a verbal argument later occurred between Karennavar and party worker Shrikant Alagur.

Savadi also claimed Karennavar had used abusive language and caste-based remarks and suggested political rivals might have instigated him.

Karennavar is currently undergoing treatment at a local hospital. *—Salar News*

1ST PHASE OPENING BY MARCH

Tree park, spanning 65 acres, to come up at Baiyappanahalli



The park will be developed on a part of the 105-acre site that belonged to the State-owned New Government Electrical Factory *PHOTO: X @MBPatil*

BENGALURU, 3 JAN

A 65-acre tree park will be developed at Baiyappanahalli at an estimated cost of Rs 37.75 crore, and its first phase is expected to open to the public in March, Large and Medium Industries Minister **MB Patil** said here on Saturday.

The park will be developed on a part of the 105-acre site that belonged to the State-owned New Government Electrical Factory (NGEF), he added. Patil visited the NGEF premises for an inspection, accompanied by senior officials.

Speaking on the occasion, the Minister said the tree park is being developed in four phases, that is, Phase 1, 1A, 1B and Phase 2. Phase 1A work is expected to be completed within six months. The site will have around 8,500 trees of various species, with their scientific names displayed. Patil emphasised that not a single tree would be felled.

A scientific assessment will guide decisions regarding the existing eucalyptus trees. He added that Rs 11.50 crore required for phase 1 works has already been released.

The administrative office buildings and sheds on NGEF premises were assessed by IISc scientists and were found structurally sound and they will be refurbished. "A multi-level parking facility capable of accommodating 5,000-7,000 vehicles will be constructed on 4.5 acres of factory-owned land outside the compound," Patil said.

He added that two convention centres, each with a seating capacity of at least 15,000, will be built.

"An incubation centre for start-ups, named 'Innoverse,' will be established by KITS. The IT-BT Department will also build a Rs 100-crore 'Technology Innovation Museum' at the site," he said.

Patil said the tree park will also feature a world-class sculpture park and a museum. He also clarified that no shopping mall would be constructed on the premises. *— PTI*

Healthcare at doorsteps of elderly in Bihar

PATNA, 3 JAN

As part of the seven resolves, 'Saat Nishchay' initiative, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Saturday rolled out a healthcare at the doorsteps service for the elderly persons in the state on a priority basis. "Our effort is to ensure that the needy senior citizens of the state avail essential health services, including facilities of nursing assistance, pathology tests at home, blood pressure check, ECG test, physiotherapy and other types of medical assistance in emergency situations, at their homes at the time of need," Nitish Kumar in an X post, wrote. The Bihar cabinet recently gave its nod to the rollout of Saat Nischay-3 over the next five years, from 2025 to 2030, to ensure Bihar's inclusion among the developed states. *—PTI*

Shah chairs Parl panel meeting in Andaman

SRI VIJAYA PURAM, 3 JAN

A Parliamentary Consultative Committee meeting of the Ministry of Home Affairs, chaired by Union Minister Amit Shah, held in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands on Saturday, discussed issues concerning national security, disaster management, cybersecurity and regional infrastructure. The meeting, which started at 11am and ended around 2.40pm, also stressed the need for using the latest technologies to fight crime and having more state-of-the-art centres, such as the Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL) and the National Forensic Sciences University (NFSU), at the regional level, sources said. A separate session on the strategic importance of Andaman and Nicobar Islands was also held, the sources said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

TMC Rajya Sabha MP Mausam Noor returns to Congress

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

Trinamool Congress Rajya Sabha MP Mausam Noor, 46, a two-time Congress party's Lok Sabha MP from Malda, West Bengal, from 2009 to 2019, came back to the Congress fold here at the AICC on Saturday. Noor joined the Congress at the party headquarters in the presence of party leaders Jairam Ramesh, AICC General Secretary Ghulam Ahmed Mir and PCC President Shubhankar Sarkar, who welcomed her back into the Congress fold. The development has come ahead of the West Bengal assembly polls. Noor, whose tenure as Rajya Sabha MP ends in April, is likely to contest the upcoming assembly polls in West Bengal from Malda. *—PTI*

Author denied entry for wearing black in M'rashtra

PUNE, 3 JAN

Controversy erupted at the 99th Akhil Bharatiya Marathi Sahitya Sammelan on Saturday, as 2025 Sahitya Akademi-winning author Pradeep Kokare was allegedly barred from the event. Police reportedly stopped Kokare for wearing a black shirt, citing strict security protocols in place for the arrival of Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. Kokare told security he was representing a publisher with two stalls and wanted to interact with readers. He added that if black attire was considered a symbol of protest, the organisers should have clearly mentioned this in the invitation. When contacted, Satara Superintendent of Police Tushar Joshi said the force had received memorandums and inputs from some outfits that black flags would be shown to the CM during the event. *—PTI*

Cong to launch nationwide stir over MGNREGA scrapping

Beginning from 10 Jan, it demands withdrawal of G RAM G Act

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

The Congress on Saturday announced a nationwide 'MGNREGA Bachao Sangram' from 10 January to 25 February to demand the withdrawal of the VB G-RAM-G Act, and restoration of MGNREGA as a rights-based law, the right to work, and the authority of panchayats.

Addressing a joint press conference, Congress General Secretaries KC Venugopal and Jairam Ramesh said through the new VBG RAM G Act, the Centre has ensured complete centralisation as "employment will no longer be a right under the new Act", which will be challenged in court.

On whether the states ruled by the INDIA bloc constituents would not implement the new Act or oppose it, Venugopal said the Congress would hold consultations with all the alliance partners on the way forward.

A consensus will be reached within the opposition-ruled chief ministers, and "we will explore possibilities of how to move forward on this", Venugopal said.

Ramesh claimed that no BJP-ruled state is in a position to implement the G RAM G law, which, he said, is against the federal structure of the country.

Venugopal also termed the Act an attack against the federal structure itself, as "no discussion was held with the states to implement it, even as their finances will be disturbed".

On 10 January, district-level press conferences will be held, followed by a day-long fast and symbolic protests at the district headquarters on 11 January, the Congress leaders said.

AICC General Secretaries KC Venugopal and Jairam Ramesh during a party briefing at AICC HQ, in New Delhi, on Saturday *PHOTO: PTI*

"Attacking MGNREGA is like attacking crores of workers and their constitutional rights. We will RESIST, peacefully and firmly, from every panchayat to Parliament

-Mallikarjun Kharge, Congress President

From 12 to 29 January, panchayat-level chaupals and mass contact programmes will be organised at all the gram panchayats, followed by ward-level peaceful sit-ins on 30 January to press for the right to work, they said.

From 7 to 15 February, state-level gheraos of Vidhan Sabhas will be organised, while four major rallies will be held between 16 and 25 February before the culmination of the nationwide movement, Venugopal said. *—PTI*

Abhishek calls CEC 'Vanish Kumar', BJP MPs 'snakes' over voter deletions

ALIPURDUAR, 3 JAN

Senior Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Abhishek Banerjee has referred to Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar as "Vanish Kumar," accusing the Election Commission of illegitimate voter deletions during the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal. Speaking at a rally in Alipurduar, a BJP stronghold, Banerjee intensified his party's criticism of both the Election Commission (EC) and the BJP ahead of the 2026 assembly elections.

"Do you know Gyanesh Kumar? He is a magician. He can make living beings disappear from voter lists and make the dead walk. He is now 'Vanish Kumar'," Banerjee asserted. He claimed that TMC leaders had sought transparency from the EC regarding the voter list process.

He compared SIR exercise to demonetisation, accusing the Modi government of misleading citizens.

He issued a stark warning to voters about trusting the BJP, likening its MPs to snakes that will eventually harm those who support them. "Leave one or two snakes behind your house; a snake will always remain a snake... It will drink milk and eat bananas but still bite you," he cautioned.

He also condemned BJP-ruled states for failing to provide essential services, questioning their capability to ensure welfare for the public. *—PTI*

TMC National General Secretary Abhishek Banerjee during a public rally ahead of the WB Assembly election, in Baruipur, West Bengal *PHOTO: PTI*

Odisha woman BDO attacked by BJP leader in office

KENDRAPARA/ BHUBANESWAR, 3 JAN

Rajnagar Block Development Officer (BDO) Tilottama Prusty, an Odisha Administrative Service (OAS) officer, was allegedly attacked in her office by a BJP leader and his supporters on Friday.

Officials said, a group of around 30 workers led by Lalit Kumar Behera barged into Prusty's chamber at the Rajnagar Block Office in Kendrapara, demanding she expedite specific administrative tasks. Prusty alleged that Behera tried to assault her but was restrained by his own supporters. The entire incident was recorded on CCTV.

Meanwhile, employees of the BDO office have halted work to protest the attack, and vehicular traffic in the town has been disrupted as BJD party workers blocked the road. *—PTI*

UNOPPOSED VICTORY

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis with Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde *PHOTO: PTI*

Mahayuti wins 68 seats in M'rashtra local body polls

MUMBAI, 3 JAN

Maharashtra's BJP and its Mahayuti allies secured 68 seats unopposed in civic polls set for 15 January, underscoring their growing urban influence even as Opposition parties accused the ruling combine of coercion and bribery.

Of these, 44 were BJP victories, concentrated in Kalyan-Dombivli Municipal Corporation, Pune, Pimpri Chinchwad, Panvel, Bhiwandi, Dhule, Jalgaon, and Ahilyanagar. BJP candidates Manjusha Nagpure and Shrikant Jagtap, representing Pune's ward 35, were elected unopposed after rivals withdrew; both had served the ward between 2017 and 2022.

Union minister Murlidhar Mohol hailed the results, asserting, "We have a target of 125 seats, out of which we have already won two, so 123 are remaining. Two seats were won unopposed. This is a certificate for our party's good governance." BJP leaders credited Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis's popularity and state president Ravindra Chavan's strategy for the success.

The Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena had 22 candidates elected unopposed, while Ajit Pawar's NCP had two. Opposition parties alleged pressure on candidates to withdraw. Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut claimed officials accepted late withdrawals under ministerial influence, calling it "mobocracy in the name of democracy."

MNS leader Avinash Jadhav criticised the process, saying, "Why hold polls if you want to win them before voting? Democracy has ended in India and the state." *—PTI*

BJP rebukes Ajit Pawar over his corruption barb

Maharashtra BJP president Ravindra Chavan has challenged Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar to "introspect" following Pawar's corruption allegations against BJP-led Pimpri Chinchwad municipal corporation ahead of the 15 January elections.

Chavan suggested the claims are part of a fabricated narrative and warned that any counter-allegations from BJP could complicate matters for Pawar.

In response, Pawar claimed the civic body has endured corruption and debt for nine years, saying, "Gangs of looters have come into existence." He also defended candidates with criminal backgrounds. *—PTI*

Sandeshkhali mob attacks cops; 6 injured, 9 arrested

KOLKATA, 3 JAN

Six policemen were injured and a police vehicle vandalised in a mob attack while attempting to arrest TMC worker Musa Mollah in Sandeshkhali on Friday night.

Officers from Nazat police station went to Boyermari village to detain Mollah over alleged illegal occupation of land and water bodies for pisciculture. As they tried to place him in a vehicle, a group of villagers, reportedly his supporters, blocked the car, threw stones, and damaged it. Reinforcements were rushed, but Mollah managed to escape, police said.

"We have arrested nine people so far, but Musa Mollah is still absconding. Efforts are on to nab him," a senior officer told PTI. Two local TMC leaders, including the gram panchayat pradhan and upa-pradhan, were detained for allegedly instigating the violence.

Police cited repeated notices served to Mollah over a land dispute and a Basirhat sub-divisional court order prohibiting illegal use of the property. CCTV footage is being examined to identify other accused, and additional forces were deployed as a precaution.

The incident sparked political reactions.

BJP leader Sajal Ghosh called it a sign of "desperation and brazenness" of ruling party activists. *—PTI*

Stalin launches pension scheme and DMK manifesto portal

CHENNAI, 3 JAN

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Saturday announced the Tamil Nadu Assured Pension Scheme (TAPS), fulfilling over two decades of demands from government employees and teachers.

The scheme guarantees 50 per cent of the last drawn salary as pension, with Dearness Allowance hikes every six months. In the event of a pensioner's death, 60 per cent of the pension will go to the nominee, while death in service entitles families to up to Rs 25 lakh as gratuity.

Employees retiring without completing the qualifying service will receive a minimum pension, and those under the Contributory Pension Scheme will be granted a Special Compassionate Pension. Implementation will require an additional Rs 13,000 crore to the Pension Fund, with annual government contributions of around Rs 11,000 crore.

On the same day, Stalin launched the DMK Election Manifesto Portal 2026, allowing citizens from all sectors to submit ideas and suggestions. Kanimozhi Karunanidhi said the portal ensures the manifesto reflects public expectations, with AI aiding recommendation analysis.

The announcement was widely welcomed by employees, teachers, and political observers. *—Agencies*

Ex-Kerala minister gets 3 yrs jail for evidence tampering

T'PURAM, 3 JAN

A court here on Saturday sentenced former Kerala transport minister Antony Raju and a court official to imprisonment for tampering with evidence in a 1990 drug seizure case.

Raju, a serving MLA of the Janadhipathya Kerala Congress and an LDF ally, was convicted by the Nedumangad Judicial First Class Magistrate, Ruby Ismail, in connection with the tampering of evidence, connected to the seizure of 61.5of hashish from an Australian at the Thiruvananthapuram International Airport in 1990.

The court also convicted K S Jose, a former clerk of the court in Thiruvananthapuram, in the case.

Both were found guilty under multiple sections of the Indian Penal Code .

Raju was sentenced to six months' imprisonment under Section 120B, three years under Section 201, three years under Section 465. *—PTI*

BILL REVIEWED AFTER 30 YEARS

Telangana Assembly passes bill scrapping two-child rule

HYDERABAD, 3 JAN

The Telangana Legislative Assembly on Saturday passed a bill to do away with the two-child norm that disqualifies individuals with more than two children from contesting local body elections.

Panchayat Raj Minister Danasari Anasuya Seethakka, who moved the Telangana Panchayat Raj (Amendment) Bill, 2026, said the two-child norm was introduced in 1994 as a population control measure to overcome the challenges of food security, unemployment and poverty associated with the the population explosion in the 1980s and 90s.

However, the government reviewed population policy 30 years after the two-child rule.

The fertility rate in rural areas in Telangana is 1.7 which is less than the replacement rate. If the fertility rate continued at 1.7, it would adversely affect the interests of Telangana's population, she said.

The government felt that it is necessary to have the replacement rate at 2.1 in view of the long term future of coming generations and also after taking consideration the views of representatives of Panchayat Raj institutions, she said.

Observing that citizens are now having less number of children, Seethakka said a steep decline in population growth would lead to undesirable consequences.

The government is proposing amendment to the Telangana Panchayat Raj Act, 2018 to improve the declining fertility rate and also for conducting local body polls, she said. *—PTI*

Panchayat Raj Minister Danasari Anasuya Seethakka *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

RSS is not a paramilitary organisation: Mohan

BHOPAL, 3 JAN

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat has stated that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) should not be misconstrued as a paramilitary organisation despite its uniforms and physical exercises. Speaking to a gathering of prominent individuals, he emphasised the unique nature of the RSS and cautioned against trying to understand it through the lens of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Bhagwat remarked, "If someone thinks it is a paramilitary organisation, it will be a mistake," and stressed that the RSS is focused on uniting society to prevent foreign domination. He condemned the "false narrative" surrounding the Sangh and encouraged people to seek information from reliable sources instead of popular platforms.

He expressed concern over the recurring invasions India has faced, stating, "What is the guarantee of Independence? We must ponder why it happens repeatedly." *—PTI*

NIA takes over ricin poison terror probe

AHMEDABAD, 3 JAN

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has handed the alleged ricin poison terror plot case to the National Investigation Agency (NIA). "The MHA has ordered the Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) to hand over the case to the NIA," ATS officials told reporters. Ricin is a highly poisonous substance that can be produced from the waste material left over from processing castor beans.

On 9 November, 2025, the ATS arrested Dr. Ahmed Mohiyuddin Saiyed, Azad Suleman Sheikh, and Mohammad Suhail Mohammad Saleem for allegedly planning a major terrorist attack using weapons and chemicals. The trio was charged under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, as well as provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and the Arms Act.

Officials had confirmed that Saiyed's handler, Abu Khadija, was from Afghanistan and linked to the Islamic State Khorasan Province, and had been in contact with several individuals in Pakistan.

According to authorities, Dr. Saiyed, an MBBS graduate from China, had begun preparing ricin for a major terrorist attack, completing research and procuring equipment and materials. *—PTI*

Bihar to celebrate Vivekananda's birth anniversary

PATNA, 3 JAN

The Bihar government will celebrate Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary on 12 January as Adhyatmikta Diwas, an official statement said. Bihar State Religious Trust Council chairman Ranbir Nandan said a programme will be held at Ravindra Bhavan in Patna, along with an essay competition based on Swami Vivekananda's Chicago address, with cash prizes for winners. Nandan said religious awareness and faith in Sanatan Dharma are growing in Bihar, noting that temples across the State saw large crowds on New Year's Day, including many young devotees. He also thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Nitish Kumar for pushing for renovation of major religious sites across the country. —*PTI*

JNUSU alleges intimidation over library surveillance

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

The Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union (JNUSU) has accused the university administration of targeting student representatives after Delhi Police issued enquiry notices to current and former union office-bearers over protests against surveillance measures at the BR Ambedkar Central Library. The notices follow an FIR filed by the administration against JNUSU President Aditi Mishra, Vice President Gopika, General Secretary Sunil, Joint Secretary Danish and former president Nitish Kumar. Mishra said they have been asked to appear before police on Saturday. JNUSU said the action relates to protests against facial recognition cameras and magnetic entry gates, alleging the administration is intimidating students instead of addressing long-standing library shortcomings. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Red Fort blast: Accused Dr Malla jailed till 16 Jan

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

A Delhi court on Saturday remanded Dr Bilal Naseer Malla, an accused in the 10 November, Red Fort blast case, to judicial custody for 13 days until 16 January. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) produced Malla before the Patiala House Court after his eight-day NIA custody ended. Media were barred from the proceedings. Principal District and Sessions Judge Anju Bajaj Chandna ordered his judicial remand. The NIA arrested Malla in Delhi on 9 December, calling him a key conspirator. Investigators allege he provided logistical support to suicide bomber Dr Umar-un-Nabi, whose explosive-laden car blast killed 15 people. The NIA has arrested nine accused so far. —*PTI*

NCC to prepare 1L cadets for disaster emergencies

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

The National Cadet Corps (NCC) will train one lakh cadets as first responders for natural disasters, NCC Director General Lieutenant general Virendra Vats said on Saturday. The trained cadets, to be known as Yuva Apda Mitras, will be linked to a national database for deployment when needed. Speaking at Delhi Cantonment, he said the NCC is setting up four to five hubs to train select cadets in drone and counter-drone operations. Around 10,000 cadets are also being trained as "cyber warriors" to strengthen digital defense. Lieutenant general Vats added that NCC commanders will carry swords for the first time at the 2026 Republic Day Parade. —*PTI*

Indore residents shun taps, turn to bottled water

Govt says all under control, only 6 dead and 200 hospitalised

INDORE, 3 JAN

Residents of Indore, Madhya Pradesh's commercial capital and repeatedly ranked India's cleanest city, are shunning municipal tap water after a deadly outbreak of vomiting and diarrhoea in the Bhagirathpura area, forcing families to depend on bottled water and tanker supply at considerable personal cost.

According to officials, six people have died and more than 200 have been hospitalised following consumption of contaminated drinking water in the locality, home to large low- and middle-income populations.

The death toll, however, remains contested, with figures ranging from 10 to 16, including a six-month-old child, as claimed by residents.

"Yes, we are now scared of drinking water from municipal taps. We need proof that the water is clean, only then will we drink it," Sunita, a resident of Marathi Mohalla, told PTI.

"My family is currently buying drinking water jars, paying Rs 20 to Rs 30 per jar." She alleged that "dirty water" had been supplied for two to three years despite repeated complaints, forcing residents to boil water and add alum before consumption.

The distrust has disrupted daily life. Tea stall owner Tushar Verma said he now uses bottled water to make tea to reassure customers, without increasing prices. Indore draws its water from the Narmada river through pipelines from Jalud in neighbouring Khargone district, around 80 km away, and receives tap supply on alternate days.

A man drinks water from a tanker amid a contaminated water crisis at Bhagirathpura, in Indore. Police seize a bell during a protest against Minister Kailash Vijayvargiya over his 'ghanta' remarks to a journalist PHOTO: PTI

District Magistrate Shivam Verma said an information, education and communication campaign is underway through NGOs, urging residents to boil water for 15 minutes and rely on municipal tankers.

Chlorination of pipelines and tube wells is in progress, a time-tested method to eliminate pathogens, experts said.

At present, 203 patients are undergoing treatment in 41 hospitals, including 34 in intensive care units, the collector said.

Political flashpoint

The crisis has triggered political tension. Around 45 Congress functionaries, including 10 women, were detained as a "precautionary measure" after clashes with Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) workers when a Congress fact-finding committee visited Bhagirathpura.

Police said the detainees were later released on bail. Congress alleged obstruction, while BJP accused it of politicising the tragedy.

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav ordered the transfer of municipal commissioner Dilip Kumar Yadav and suspended two senior officials.

The State government told the High Court the outbreak is under effective control, with continuous monitoring to prevent resurgence.

Health officials said water samples are being examined and corrective measures intensified, while residents await restoration of confidence in civic supply, seeking accountability, transparency and safeguards to prevent recurrence of such health emergencies. —*PTI*

'MAJOR BLOW TO MAOISTS'

Police address media after 14 maoists were killed in separate encounters in Bijapur and Sukma districts of Chhatisgarh PHOTO: ANI

Bastar ops leave 14 Maoists dead in Chhatisgarh

SUKMA/BIJAPUR, 3 JAN

Security forces killed 14 Maoists, including senior ultras Mangtu and Hunga Madkam, in separate encounters in Sukma and Bijapur districts of Chhattisgarh in the Bastar region on Saturday, officials said.

Twelve Maoists, including Mangtu, a divisional committee member, were neutralised during an exchange of fire in Sukma when a team of security personnel was conducting an anti-Naxalite operation in the southern part of the district, a senior police official said.

In a separate operation in Bijapur, the bodies of two Maoist cadres, including Hunga Madkam, were recovered from forests near Gaganpalli village in the Basaguda area, senior officials in the Ministry of Home Affairs said.

One self-loading rifle and a 12-bore weapon were seized from the site.

According to officials, the Bijapur encounter took place around 5am when a District Reserve Guard team, a unit of the state police, was carrying out a similar operation in the southern region of the district.

Intermittent firing was reported when last information was received, and further details were awaited.

Security forces have intensified operations in the Bastar region to dismantle Maoist networks and curb insurgent violence.

Last year, 285 Naxalites were killed in separate encounters with security forces across Chhattisgarh, underlining the sustained push against Left Wing Extremism in the state.

Officials said combing operations were continuing, and the situation remained under close watch as reinforcements secured surrounding forested areas today morning. —*PTI*

Kerala govt freezes K-TET order

T'PURAM, 3 JAN

The Kerala government on Saturday put on hold its order making the Kerala Teachers' Eligibility Test (K-TET) mandatory for appointments and promotions in government and aided schools, citing concerns over its impact on serving teachers.

Under the interim decision, candidates who have cleared K-TET Category I or II will remain eligible for appointment as Lower Primary and Upper Primary teachers. General Education Minister V Sivankutty said the January 1, 2026 order would remain frozen until further notice.

The government will file a review petition in the Supreme Court, arguing that the recent K-TET judgment adversely affects teachers appointed before April 1, 2010, following Supreme Court rulings in August 2023 and September 2025.

Education Minister V Sivankutty said the government is committed to protecting teachers recruited under existing rules.

"Not even a single teacher appointed before 2010 will lose their job," he said. He said imposing a qualification that did not exist earlier violates natural justice and Article 14.

A notification has been issued to conduct K-TET in February 2026, and officials were asked to expedite the review petition, urging teachers not panic. —*PTI*

MAGH MELA BEGINS

Lakhs of devotees brave the cold to take a holy dip in the Ganga at the Sangam ghats in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, as Magh Mela began on Saturday under tight security PHOTO: PTI

MAN BEATEN UP OVER B'DESHI SUSPICION

MADHUBANI, 3 JAN

A man was allegedly beaten up in Bihar's Madhubani district after being wrongly suspected of being a Bangladeshi national, prompting police action after a video of the incident went viral on social media.

The video showed two youths assaulting the victim, whom they presumed to be an illegal immigrant. Madhubani Superintendent of Police Yogendra Kumar said the police social media cell immediately verified the clip and found that the incident took place in Chakda, under the Rajnagar police station area.

"The two individuals seen assaulting the victim have been identified as residents of Rajnagar," Kumar said, adding that the victim is a mason from Birpur in Supaul district.

Police have registered a case under sections related to attempt to murder. Raids are underway to arrest the accused, the SP said, warning that strict action would be taken against those spreading rumours and circulating such videos.

The police further appealed for restraint. — *Agencies*

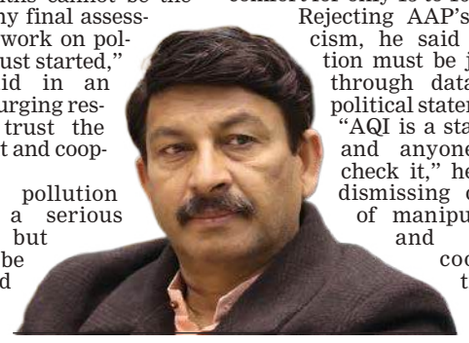
10 months too short to judge BJP's effort against smog: Tiwari

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

The Delhi government should be given at least two years to tackle pollution, BJP MP Manoj Tiwari said on Saturday, arguing that 10 months was too short to judge its performance.

"Ten months cannot be the basis for any final assessment. Our work on pollution has just started," Tiwari said in an interview, urging residents to trust the government and cooperate.

He said pollution remained a serious challenge but could not be reduced overnight. Delhi recorded improved air quality on Friday, with the AQI at 236, leading to the revocation of GRAP Stage 3 restrictions. Citing personal experience as an asthma patient, Tiwari said he earlier stayed outside Delhi for over a month due to pollution, but this year faced discomfort for only 15 to 16 days.



Rejecting AAP's criticism, he said pollution must be judged through data, not political statements. "AQI is a standard and anyone can check it," he said, dismissing claims of manipulation and urged cooperation. —*PTI*

Chill, fog persist across north India

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

The national capital recorded a minimum temperature of 8.1 degrees Celsius on Saturday, slightly above normal, even as the IMD forecast a cold wave at isolated places between January 3 and 6. Relative humidity stood at 95 per cent, while the AQI was 240, in the poor category. Cold conditions also gripped Rajasthan, where Fatehpur in Sikar was the coldest at 2.8 degrees Celsius and dense fog affected eastern districts. Punjab and Haryana remained cold too, though many locations reported above-normal minima. —*PTI*

Set timelines in probes only if there's delay: SC

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

The Supreme Court has held that timelines for completing investigations are an exception, not the rule, and are applied "reactively" rather than "prophylactically".

A bench of Justices Sanjay Karol and NK Singh said this while setting aside an Allahabad High Court order that directed the Uttar Pradesh police to complete an arms licence probe within 90 days and granted interim protection to the accused from coercive action.

"In sum, timelines are imposed reactively and not prophylactically," the bench said, reiterating that courts intervene only when delay itself begins to cause prejudice. Directing time-bound investigations at the outset would intrude into the investigative domain.

The court said investigations involve uncertainty and multiple variables, and the law therefore gives agencies latitude. However, probes cannot remain open-ended, as the right to a speedy trial, including a diligent investigation, is part of Article 21.

Justice Karol said timelines are warranted where there is evident stagnation, unexplained inaction, or unjustified delay. —*PTI*

GAPS IN RURAL HEALTHCARE

Pregnant woman dies after 6km walk for delivery in Maharashtra

GADCHIROLI, 3 JAN

A 24-year-old pregnant woman died after walking six kilometres through forest paths from her remote village in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district to seek medical help for childbirth, highlighting persistent gaps in rural healthcare access.

Asha Santosh Kiranga, a resident of Aaldandi Tola in Etapalli taluk, was nine months pregnant. Her village is cut off from the main road and lacks facilities for institutional delivery, an official said. Hoping to reach care in time, she left her village on 1 January with her husband and walked nearly six kilometres through dense jungle to her sister's home in Petha.

The physical strain of the journey proved devastating. Early on 2 January, Kiranga developed severe labour pains and was rushed by ambulance to Kali Ammal Hospital in Hedri. Doctors decided to perform a caesarean section, but by then the baby had died in the womb. Her blood pressure rose sharply and she died soon after, the official said.

Gadchiroli District Health Officer Dr Pratap Shinde said the woman had been registered with ASHA workers and was under routine monitoring. "The sudden onset of labour pains and complications were likely triggered by the long walk. Doctors made all efforts to save her, but could not," he said. —*PTI*

Dalit student death row: HP suspends asst prof

GADCHIROLI, 3 JAN

The Himachal Pradesh government on Saturday suspended an assistant professor of Government College, Dharamshala, and ordered parallel state and UGC probes into the alleged sexual harassment and ragging of a 19-year-old Dalit student who died during treatment last week.

Assistant Professor (Geography) Ashok Kumar was suspensed with immediate effect following an FIR for sexual harassment, pending a departmental inquiry, according to an order issued by Education Secretary Rakesh Kanwar. The accused, who has obtained anticipatory bail, denied the allegations and said he would cooperate with investigators.

CM Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu said the suspension was based on the victim's video statement naming the professor. "An inquiry will be initiated and strict action will be taken against all those involved," he said.

A four-member state committee headed by Additional Director Higher Education Harish Kumar has been tasked with submitting a report within three days on allegations of sexual harassment, ragging and caste-based abuse. Separately, the UGC constituted a five-member fact-finding committee after its anti-ragging helpline took suo motu cognisance.

The student died on 26 December at a Ludhiana hospital. Three students were booked for ragging and causing hurt, and the professor for sexual harassment, following a complaint. Kangra police said records, clips and witness statements are being examined. —*PTI*

MAN VS BULL

More than 900 bulls and 300 bull-tamers took part in the year's first Jallikattu event on Saturday at Thachankurichi village in Pudukottai, Tamil Nadu. Bulls from Tiruchirappalli, Dindigul and Sivaganga charged out as uniformed tamers attempted to cling to their humps, the key measure used to determine winners. Motorcycles, bicycles and traditional cooking and storage pots were offered as prizes to successful tamers and bull owners. The event marked the start of Pongal celebrations
PHOTO: PTI

VENEZUELA BECOMES TRUMP'S NEW TARGET

US airstrikes on Venezuela on 3 January have reignited speculation that Washington is seeking to remove President Nicolás Maduro by force.

The idea was already gaining traction following an interview published by Vanity Fair in late December, which suggested regime change had become a priority for US President Donald Trump's second administration.

The interview made headlines after Trump's chief of staff, Susie Wiles, said the president "wants to keep on blowing boats up until Maduro cries uncle" — a colloquial American expression meaning to plead for mercy. She was referring to a months-long US campaign targeting suspected Venezuelan drug-smuggling boats in the Caribbean.

Initially, the strikes appeared to fit Trump's long-standing focus on narcotics trafficking. He has repeatedly pledged to shut down drug routes into the United States and this week went further, declaring fentanyl — a priority of both his presidencies — a weapon of mass destruction.

Others suggested the campaign was a pretext to extract greater access to Venezuelan resources, particularly oil and rare earths. Trump has since ordered a blockade of sanctioned Venezuelan oil tankers.

But Wiles' remarks have shifted the narrative. Rather than drugs or resources, Maduro himself now appears to be the central target.

"I don't think that was the objective in January when they came in," said Paul Hare, a retired UK diplomat and former ambassador, now acting director of Boston University's Center for Latin American Studies.

"The idea was to do a deal on deportations with Maduro, maybe get some oil concessions for Americans, and do a kind of business deal which would allow him to remain in power."

A regional focus

Removing Maduro would be no simple task, but analysts say it may be more achievable for the Trump administration than resolving wars in Ukraine or Gaza.

Residents evacuate a building near the Miraflores presidential palace after explosions and low-flying aircraft were heard in Caracas Venezuela on Saturday
PHOTO: PTI

It would also fit neatly with its national security strategy, which refocuses US power on what Washington sees as its sphere of influence in the Western Hemisphere.

Jesus Renzullo, a Latin America analyst at the German Institute for Global and Area Studies, said Secretary of State Marco Rubio — a long-time critic of the Maduro regime — may also see an opportunity to apply pressure beyond Venezuela, particularly on Cuba.

Cuba, Renzullo said, is economically and militarily weaker and depends heavily on Venezuelan energy supplies.

"Venezuela is the only wildcard that Cuba still can rely on in the region," he said. "If Venezuela falls, Cuba would be really, really hindered and would suffer economically."

However, Renzullo warned that current measures may be insufficient to force change in Caracas.

"The blockade is not enough," he said. "Caracas survived much harsher sanctions during the 'maximum pressure' campaign in 2019."

Hare is sceptical that Venezuela signals a broader interventionist push across Latin America.

"Maduro is illegitimate, but it's seen as a special case," he said. "I don't think it would be followed by further aggression against other countries. The concern is specifically about the illegality of Maduro's rule."

LEGACY AND DOMESTIC POLITICS

While the prospect of regime change is now openly discussed, the motivations behind it remain debated.

The Trump administration, particularly Rubio, has supported Venezuela's opposition, led by Nobel Peace Prize winner María Corina Machado. Machado has welcomed US pressure and openly backed Trump's actions in the Caribbean.

But some analysts argue Trump's objectives have less to do with democracy.

"It's not about oil," said Jim Marckwardt, a retired US Army lieutenant colonel and faculty co-lead for the Americas at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies. "And in this case, it's not really about democracy either." That assessment may surprise observers, given Trump's 2019 recognition of opposition leader Juan Guaidó as Venezuela's legitimate president. Yet Maduro remains firmly in power, even after the disputed 2024 election, which independent observers say the opposition won.

Instead, Marckwardt believes Trump is motivated by legacy.

"The Venezuela crisis exploded in 2019 and wasn't resolved then. Biden didn't resolve it either," he said. "Trump does care about his legacy."

"He's tried to address Gaza, he's pushing hard on Ukraine and Russia. Venezuela is closer to home and arguably an easier problem to solve."

Domestic politics may also be at play. Trump's popularity has slipped since his re-election, including among Latin American diaspora communities that helped secure his return to the White House.

"This is an easy way to appeal to that electorate," Marckwardt said, pointing to the concentration of Venezuelan and Cuban voters in Florida, a key Trump stronghold.

Whether the strategy succeeds — or escalates into something more dangerous — remains to be seen. But for now, the signals from Washington suggest Venezuela has moved sharply up the list of US foreign policy priorities. *—PTI*

SALAR

Who tells the story when journalists are silenced?

On 10 December, the year 2025 reached a murderous milestone. In 2024, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) had recorded 126 journalists and media workers killed, the highest number since the CPJ first began keeping records in 1992. In 2025, the figure was matched with three weeks of the year still to go.

One nationality, Palestinian, has paid by far the highest price. "Israel has killed almost 250 journalists since the Israel-Gaza war began in 2023," the CPJ reported.

What does this mean for audiences' understanding of a world where international affairs are dominated by war, the climate crisis and unpredictable politics?

As far back as the early years of the US, and through the European revolutions of the 19th centuries, information and freedom have been linked. In 1787, Thomas Jefferson wrote: "Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter."

Today, we have access to more media than at any other time in human history. But this vast amount of information has not necessarily meant more reliable information. Governments and tech companies striving to control the message often succeed.

Israel has banned international journalists entering Gaza. Palestinian journalists continue, at great risk, to report from the territory. Russia, meanwhile, has placed restrictions on reporting its "special military operation" – in a word, war – on Ukraine.

A generation ago, when the CPJ first began keeping data on journalists' deaths, it was different. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the cold war allowed international media organisations freedom to work as never before in the former Soviet bloc.

As those countries embraced political change, they encouraged freer media to flourish within their new societies. True, these media were often influenced by political and business interests – the news media often are. But there was plurality where previously there had only been the party line.

The 1990s, imperfect though they were as a time of press freedom, were better than what has followed since. As the media academic and former foreign correspondent Peter Greste has persuasively argued, the aftermath of 9/11 involved state power extending, "into control over information and ideas. They did that by loosening the definitions of what constituted 'terrorism' and 'national security'".

Greste's words were informed by the price he had paid for his own journalism. In late 2013, along with two colleagues, Mohamed Fadel Fahmy and Baher Mohammad, he was detained in Egypt on terrorism charges. He spent 400 days in prison. The charges had resulted from the fact that he had spoken to the Muslim Brotherhood as part of his reporting.

"How do you accurately and fairly report on Egypt's ongoing political struggle without talking to everyone involved?" he wrote at the time.

INFORMATION ACCESS

It is not new that governments seek to control media. What is new is that the US is so proudly among them. Jefferson would probably not like what the current US government is doing, especially its recent policy of restricting access to the Pentagon for reporters who themselves refuse restrictions on their reporting.

The words that follow Jefferson's discussion of the relative merits of governments and newspapers are less well remembered: "But I should mean that every man should receive those papers and be capable of reading them."

Outdated gendered language aside, that, today, is the problem. For while we have more and more media, we have far less media freedom.

In the age of mass media, news organisations have largely controlled the means of distribution. Today, the tech companies take the lead. Not everyone is receiving the "papers". Where they are not formally censored, they are harder to find and cost money, unlike social media content.

Algorithms may be adjusted to give us more cat videos and fewer questions. Governments and criminals place physical restrictions, up to and including death, on journalists' work. Powerful politicians use legal action – or the threat of it – to silence trusted news organisations.

In my previous career as an international correspondent, I reported on wars in the former Soviet Union and the Middle East. In the 1990s and 2000s, journalists were often restricted by governments not wanting bad news reported – but rarely simply banned as they increasingly seem to be now.

In Gaza and in Russia, international journalists are unable to access places they need to tell the story. In both cases, courageous reporters from those countries risk danger and even death to try to tell the world what is happening.

The restrictions placed upon journalists today may mean that governments seem to be winning at the moment. Their desire to control confirms the power to challenge that journalism still holds. *—The Conversation*

Earlier in August, six journalists, including Anas al-Sharif, were killed in an Israeli air strike on a tent sheltering media workers in Gaza City's Al-Shifa Hospital
PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Air pollution biggest public health crisis in India since Covid: Doctors

Air pollution is emerging as one of India's most serious public health challenges since the Covid-19 pandemic and is set to worsen annually unless urgent corrective steps are taken, a UK-based Indian-origin pulmonologist has warned, cautioning that a growing wave of airway disease remains largely undetected and untreated.

In an interaction with PTI, several senior doctors practising in the UK said a substantial and largely invisible burden of undiagnosed airway disease is "building beneath the surface", with its impact expected to place sustained pressure on both citizens and the healthcare system in India.

They also linked the global rise in cardiovascular diseases over the past decade to increased exposure to toxic emissions from urban transport, including automobiles and aircraft, especially in major cities in India, the UK and elsewhere, rather than attributing it solely to obesity.

Union transport minister Nitin Gadkari earlier this week acknowledged that nearly 40 per cent of Delhi's pollution originates from the transport sector due to heavy reliance on fossil fuels, while stressing the need for cleaner alternatives and promoting the use of biofuels.

During the recently concluded winter session of Parliament, the government stated that there is no conclusive data establishing a direct correlation between higher Air Quality Index (AQI) levels and lung diseases, even as it accepted that air pollution is among the triggering factors for respiratory ailments and related conditions.

"The Indian government's renewed focus on controlling air pollution is necessary and overdue. However, it is time to confront an uncomfortable truth: for millions living in North India, the damage has already been done. What is currently being managed represents only the tip of the iceberg. A vast, hidden burden of undiagnosed airway disease is building beneath the surface," Consultant Pulmonologist in Liverpool and former Covid-19 Advisory Committee member of India's health ministry, Manish Gautam, told PTI.

Gautam warned that prolonged exposure has already set in motion a lung health emergency and urged policymakers to prioritise early diagnosis and treatment of airway diseases, including the creation of a rapid "lung health task group".

Doctors noted that Delhi hospitals alone saw a 20 to 30 per cent rise in respiratory patients in December, with

An anti-smog gun being used to curb air pollution as people visit the India Gate in New Delhi
PHOTO: PTI

many first-time cases and young adults among those affected.

With more than two decades of experience in the UK's National Health Service, Gautam added that while pollution control and preventive strategies remain essential, they are no longer sufficient in isolation.

"India has shown before that large-scale public health interventions are possible. Government initiatives have significantly reduced the impact of tuberculosis through early diagnosis, and structured treatment programmes. A similar level of urgency and investment is now required for airway diseases," the Liverpool-based pulmonologist told PTI.

The government has reiterated in Parliament that there is no conclusive data establishing a direct causal link between air pollution and mortality or disease.

However, according to Rajay Narain, Honorary Cardiologist at St George's University Hospital in London, there is "overwhelming scientific evidence" connecting air pollution to cardiovascular, respiratory, neurological and systemic diseases, and any delay in action would further increase both health and economic costs.

He emphasised that while short-term measures may help reduce immediate exposure, long-term, science-based policies focused on clean air, protection of vulnerable groups and accountability across sectors are critical.

"Many early symptoms, such as headaches, fatigue, mild cough, throat irritation, digestive discomfort, eye dryness, skin rashes and recurrent infections, are often dismissed as minor issues but may represent early warning signs of serious chronic disease," Narain told PTI.

Health ministry data presented during the winter session of Parliament showed that more than two lakh cases of acute respiratory illness were recorded in Delhi over the past three years, with around 30,000 patients requiring hospitalisation.

Drawing attention to less obvious risks, Professor Derek Connolly, a consultant cardiologist at Midland Metropolitan University Hospital in Birmingham, said people living in polluted cities face invisible cardiovascular dangers even on days when air quality appears acceptable.

"People do not realise that cardiovascular disease is an extremely slow process, with episodes of rapid deterioration. This is a silent killer. Most people are unaware of their exposure because particulate matter is invisible and cannot be measured as easily as blood pressure or cholesterol levels. We are all exposed to it, even on days when pollution does not seem too bad," Connolly told PTI.

The Birmingham-based cardiologist added that although the rise in cardiovascular disease over the past decade has often been attributed to obesity, he believes a significant share is linked to the growing presence of automobiles and aircraft releasing toxic substances into the air.

According to the '2025 Report of The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change', PM2.5 pollution caused over 17 lakh deaths in India in 2022, with petrol use in road transport alone accounting for 2.69 lakh of those deaths.

In May, a global study by the International Council on Clean Transportation found that policies aimed at reducing road transport emissions could save 1.9 million lives and prevent 1.4 million new cases of childhood asthma worldwide by 2040.

Healthcare professionals have repeatedly highlighted the widespread public health impact of air pollution over the years, underscoring the growing urgency for decisive intervention. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Trump orders divestment in $2.9M chip deal

WASHINGTON, 3 JAN

President Donald Trump on Friday ordered the unravelling of a USD 2.9 million computer chips deal that he concluded threatened US security interests if the current owner, HieFo Corp, remained in control of the technology. The executive order cast a spotlight on a business deal that drew scant attention when it was announced in May 2024 during former president Joe Biden's administration. The deal involved aerospace and defence specialist Emcore Corp selling its computer chips and wafer fabrication operations to HieFo for USD 2.92 million. But Trump is now demanding that HieFo divest that technology within 180 days, citing "credible evidence" that the current owner is a citizen of the People's Republic of China. *—PTI*

7 die, 100 missing as boat capsizes near Gambia

BANJUL, 3 JAN

Seven people died and dozens were missing after a boat carrying more than 200 migrants on their way to Europe capsized off the coast of Gambia, President Adama Barrow said late on Friday as rescuers frantically searched for survivors. At least 102 survivors have been rescued from the boat that capsized on New Year's Eve in northwest Gambia's North Bank region, but the rest are missing. Thousands of Africans risk their lives travelling on boats along the Atlantic coast, one of the world's deadliest migrant routes that connects the West African coast across Gambia, Senegal and Mauritania to Europe. Last year at least 150 people were dead or missing after a boat capsized near Gambia – similar to the toll in 2024. *—PTI*

2 die as 6.5 earthquake rocks Mexico

MEXICO CITY, 3 JAN

A strong earthquake rattled southern and central Mexico on Friday, interrupting President Claudia Sheinbaum's first press briefing of the new year as seismic alarms sounded and leaving at least two people dead. The earthquake had a magnitude of 6.5 and its epicenter was near the town of San Marcos in the southern state of Guerrero near the Pacific coast resort of Acapulco, according to Mexico's national seismological agency. The state's civil defence agency said various landslides around Acapulco and on other highways. Guerrero Gov Evelyn Salgado said that a 50-year-old woman living in a small community near the epicentre died when her home collapsed. *—PTI*

Israel criticises Mamdani for revoking orders

TEL AVIV, 3 JAN

The Israeli government on Friday accused New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani of "antisemitism" after he revoked two executive orders issued by the previous mayor that restricted city agencies from boycotting Israel and treated certain criticism of Israel as antisemitic. "On his very first day as New York City Mayor, Mamdani shows his true face: He scraps the IHRA definition of antisemitism and lifts restrictions on boycotting Israel. This isn't leadership. It's antisemitic gasoline on an open fire," the Israeli Foreign Ministry wrote on X.

Mamdani withdrew directives issued by former mayor Eric Adams. He defended his decision at a press conference on Friday, saying that several Jewish groups in the city had also raised concerns about the broader definition of the term. *—ANI*

US military strikes rock Venezuela's capital Caracas on Saturday
PHOTO: X @SENTDEFENDER

US will decide what is next for Venezuela: Trump

Russia, Cuba, Brazil condemn legally questionable strikes

WASHINGTON/CARACAS, 3 JAN

President Donald Trump has said the US will play a major role in deciding who governs Venezuela following the capture of President Nicolás Maduro and his removal from the country in a US military operation. Speaking to Fox News on Saturday morning, hours after the operation, Trump said, "We can't take a chance in letting somebody else run and just take over what he left, or left off," he said, signalling a hands-on American role in shaping the country's political future.

Trump also addressed wider regional implications, insisting the operation was "not meant to be" a message to Mexico. However, he repeated claims that Mexican drug cartels effectively control the country and suggested US action could follow. He said he had offered Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum US help to "take out the cartels", which she refused.

The legal basis for the Venezuela operation remains unclear. The US does not recognise the International Criminal Court and Congress has not approved a specific authorisation for the use of military force against Venezuela.

Asked whether he would back Opposition figure María Corina Machado, currently in Norway after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, Trump said the issue was under review, noting that Venezuela has a sitting Vice President.

> **I watched the overnight capture of Maduro and his wife literally like I was watching a television show. If you would've seen the speed, the violence, it was an amazing thing**
>
> —Donald Trump, US President

International reaction was swift and divided. China said it was "deeply shocked", accusing the US of violating international law and Venezuelan sovereignty. Cuba, Brazil and Iran condemned the action, with Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel calling it a "criminal attack" and warning that Latin America's "zone of peace" was under threat.

Russia did not mince words, calling it an "act of armed agression". In a statement, Moscow said, "Ideological hostility has triumphed over businesslike pragmatism."

However, Argentina's President Javier Milei praised the move, declaring: "Long live freedom, damn it!"

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the EU supports a "democratic transition in Venezuela".

The UN said it was "deeply alarmed", warning the escalation could violate international law and set a dangerous precedent.

With Venezuela's leadership uncertain, streets in Caracas largely quiet, and global tensions rising, it remains unclear whether further US action will follow or how power will ultimately be transferred. *—PTI*

Khamenei warns 'rioters' as toll rises

DUBAI/ NEW YORK, 3 JAN

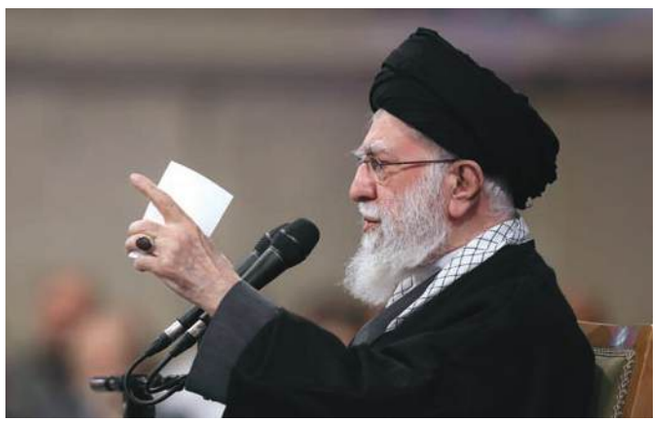
Violence surrounding protests in Iran sparked by the ailing economy killed two more people, authorities said, raising the death toll in the demonstrations to at least 10. With the protests showed no signs of stopping, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said "rioters must be put in their place".

The deaths overnight into Saturday involved a new level of violence. In Qom, home to the country's major Shiite seminaries, a grenade exploded, killing a man. Meanwhile, in town of Harsin, Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard repportedly died in a gun and knife attack.

These follow US President Donald Trump warning Iran on Friday that if Tehran "violently kills peaceful protesters," the US was "locked and loaded" to "will come to their rescue." His comments sparked an angry response from officials within the theocracy threatening to target American troops in the Mideast.

Adressing the nation Khamenei said, "There is no benefit to talking to rioters. Rioters must be put in their place." He said that the foreign powers such as Israel and US were pushing shopkeepers to protest.

He called on the public to "stand against the enemy".



Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei ***PHOTO: PTI***

> **Trump,... this warning you have issued.... gives my people greater strength and hope that, at last, a President of the US is standing firmly by their side.... as they risk their lives to end this regime's 46-year reign of chaos and terror**
>
> —Reza Pahlavi, Iran's former crown prince

Iran currency has rapidly depreciated, with USD 1 now costing some 1.4 million Iranian Rials.

IRAN WRITES TO UN

Iran's permanent representative to the United Nations, Amir Saeed Iravani, wrote to the UN Secretary-General and the President of the UN Security Council on Friday, urging international condemnation of Trump's "unlawful... (and) inciting threats". *—Agencies*

Supporters of the Southern Transitional Council (STC) hold South Yemen flags during a rally, in Aden, Yemen ***PHOTO: PTI***

Yemen's militants say South is independent

ADEN, 3 JAN

Yemen's separatist movement on Friday announced a constitution for an independent southern nation. The announcement is an escalation of a decades-long civil war that has pitted Gulf powerhouses Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) against each other.

The UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC) depicted the announcement as a declaration of independence for the south. But it was not immediately clear if the move could be implemented.

The head of the STC, Aidarous al-Zubaid, said that the constitution would be in effect for two years, after which a referendum would be held on "exercising the right to self-determination."

The 30-article constitution proclaimed the creation of "the State of South Arabia," covering the same territory of the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, the independent southern state that existed from 1967-1990.

The move comes after escalating tensions between groups backed by Saudi Arabia and the UAE – which had previously been part of a coalition fighting the Iran-backed Houthis in the north. Saudi Arabia's military directly intervened and bombed STC camps and ports after the UAE-backed fighters seized control of regions from Riyadh-backed National Shield Forces.

Meanwhile, the UAE announced that all its military has withdrawn from Yemen. *—PTI*

Japan's Takaichi to meet Trump amid Taiwan tensions

WASHINGTON/ SEOUL, 3 JAN

US President Donald Trump invited Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi during a phone call Friday on to visit the US this year, the Japanese Foreign Ministry said, in what would be the Tokyo's first woman Prime Minister's first trip to the US since taking office in October.

The is likely to happen during Washington's Cherry Blossom festival, which takes place around March.

This comes as ties between Japan and China have been strained, ramping up tensions in the region.

Beijing staged two-day military exercises in the waters off Taiwan this week. Takaichi had earlier said Chinese military action against Taiwan could be grounds for a Japanese military response.

S KOREA AFFIRMS ONE-CHINA POLICY

South Korean President Lee Jae-Myung has reaffirmed his country's respect for the One-China principle before his three day visit to China where he will meet President Xi Jinping. One-China says that Taiwan is part Beijing's territory. *—Agencies*

Military-affiliated party leads in Myanmar's early election results

BANGKOK, 3 JAN

Myanmar's military-appointed election body has begun announcing the winners of the first phase of its three-part general election, saying that the military-backed party has won the majority of seats, as widely expected.

Critics of the current system say that the election is designed to add a I of legitimacy to the status quo. They charge the polls are neither free nor fair because of the exclusion of major parties and government repression of dissenters. Opposition groups have called for a boycott by voters. The military government said Wednesday that more than 6 million people — about 52 per cent of the more than 11 million eligible voters in the first phase of elections held 28 December — cast ballots, calling the turnout a decisive success.

The Union Election Commission (UEC) announced in the state-run Myanma Alinn newspaper on Saturday that the Union Solidarity and Development Party, or USDP, won 38 seats in the 330-seat Pyithu Hluttaw lower house, though many seats from the election held on 28 December have yet to be declared.

Saturday's announcement was still a partial result, but the USDP's leaders were convinced of success for the first phase. *—PTI*

Russia kills 2, injures 28 in Ukraine

KYIV, 3 JAN

Russian drones and missiles killed at least two people and injuring 28 others, in Ukraine's Kharkiv region, officials said on Friday. Among the deceased was a two-year old child.

"A heinous Russian strike on Kharkiv. Preliminary reports indicate two missiles struck an ordinary residential area. One of the buildings has been severely damaged. A rescue operation is currently underway," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on X.

- This comes after Russia said Ukraine killed 28 people during a New Year's. Kyiv denied the strikes and said Russia was using used Western drone fragments to target its own civilians.

Russia, however, denied the strikes. This comes after Russia said Ukrainian drones killed at least 28 people during a New Year's party in Moscow-occupied Kherson. Ukraine denied the strikes and said that Russia was using used Western drone fragments to target its own civilians to derail peace talks.

Meanwhile, Zelenskyy appointed Gen Kyrylo Budanov, Ukraine's Military Intelligence head as his new Chief of Staff after the previous chief was sacked during a corruption trial. *—Agencies*

A toddler was killed in the Russian strikes on Ukraine's Kharkiv
PHOTO: X @ZELENSKYYUA

AHEAD OF B'DESH FEB POLLS

13 NCP leaders resign over Jamaat ties

DHAKA, 3 JAN

Thirteen top leaders of the student-led National Citizen Party (NCP) have stepped down over the last eight days in protest against the party's alliance with Jamaat-e-Islami, ahead of the next month's elections. The student leaders have accused the NCP, which has the backing of Bangladesh interim government Chief Muhammad Yunus, of making political compromises and a lack of transparency in decision-making.

Mir Arshadul Hoque, nominated for Chattogram-16, Tasnim Jara, Tajnuva Jabeen, nominated for Dhaka-17, Azad Khan Bhashani, Arif Sohel, Khaled Saifullah, Mushfiq Us Salehin, Khan Md Morsalin, Farhad Alam Bhuiyan, Al Amin Ahmed Tutul, Asif Mostafa Jamal, Mir Habib Al Manjur and Wahiduzzaman, are reported to have resigned.

The NCP is an offshoot of the student body whose movement that toppled the Sheikh Hasina government ***PHOTO: FB/ NAHID ISLAM***

Thirty central leaders of NCP, an offshoot of the SAD (Students Against Discrimination), which had spearheaded the 2024 violent 'July Uprising', had earlier, in a memorandum titled "Principled objections to a potential alliance in light of the accountability of the July Uprising and party values" to party convener Nahid Islam, voiced their objections to the proposed partnership with Jamaat-e-Islami.

The memorandum highlighted the Jamaat's controversial political history, particularly its role against Bangladesh's independence and its alleged complicity in genocide and crimes during the 1971 Liberation War, describing these as fundamentally incompatible with Bangladesh's democratic spirit.

The student leaders warned that the planned alliance with the Jamaat would undermine the NCP's political credibility and public trust, creating confusion and disappointment among "many of our activists and supporters, especially among the younger generation and ordinary citizens who support new politics".

Jamaat chief Shafiqur Rahman announced the alliance with the NCP last week at a press conference at the National Press Club in Dhaka, the report said. *—PTI*

Pak attacked Afghan on foreign directions: Taliban

KABUL, 3 JAN

Afghanistan has stated that tension between Kabul and Islamabad serves no "constructive purpose", and the Pakistani side is acting as mercenaries and hired killers, dictated by "another side".

"This is not Pakistan's war. This war is being dictated by another side, and they (the attackers) are acting as mercenaries and hired killers. Or it could be that they assumed, and even promoted, the idea that the Islamic Emirate was an extension of Pakistan and under its control. Pakistan may have believed this was true," **Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid** said.

Expanding on this position, Mujahid said tensions between Kabul and Islamabad have negatively affected several sectors and serve no constructive purpose, according to Tolo News.

He linked the situation to two possible factors, suggesting that certain circles in Pakistan may be acting at the direction of another country or that they expected the Taliban, after coming to power, to remain under Pakistan's influence.

Against this backdrop, Mujahid rejected the idea that the current tensions reflect Pakistan's own interests.

Meanwhile, religious scholars and political figures, speaking called for the immediate resumption of talks between the two countries to rebuild trust and support humanitarian efforts at border crossings. *—ANI*

PHOTO: ANI

M'rashtra Airport gets DGCA nod for 24X7 operations

MUMBAI, 3 JAN

The Sindhudurg Airport in the Konkan region of Maharashtra has received aviation safety regulator DGCA's approval for round-the-clock operations, including during low visibility and adverse weather conditions, a statement by IRB Infrastructure Developers said. The airport, operated by IRB Infrastructure, started commercial operations in October 2021. The approval includes published satellite-based Required Navigation Performance (RNP) procedures and the availability of a backup navigation aid. Together, these systems provide pilots with instrument approach guidance and also a reliable non-satellite backup, ensuring safer landings and more dependable flight operations for all aircraft types throughout the year. *—PTI*

IndiGo boosts ops in Puducherry with 14 flights

CHENNAI, 3 JAN

IndiGo has strengthened its services in Puducherry, operating 14 flights a week to enhance its regional connectivity, the airliner said on Saturday. Enhanced air connectivity has supported Puducherry's development across multiple sectors. The airliner commenced operations from Puducherry on 20 December 2024. As of December 2025, it operates 14 flights per week from Puducherry, connecting the city with Bengaluru and Hyderabad. IndiGo stated that with enhanced connectivity to Bengaluru and Hyderabad, Puducherry residents can easily travel for specialised healthcare and higher education. The air service has also enabled onward connectivity for passengers from Puducherry travelling across India and to overseas destinations. *—PTI*

NSO releases user-guide for data users

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

The Statistics Ministry on Friday, released a user guide to transparently explain survey processes and help users better understand data on unincorporated sector enterprises. The National Statistics Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, has released its first-ever publication, Know Your Survey: A User Guide to the Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE). "It is the first of its kind user guide aimed at proactively engaging with users in a more transparent and user-friendly manner to enhance informed use of ASUSE data," the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation said in a statement. *—PTI*

T'puram airport gets Level-3 accreditation

T'PURAM, 3 JAN

Thiruvananthapuram International Airport (TRV) has been awarded the Airports Council International Level 3 accreditation for customer experience. The accreditation was upgraded from Level 2, which was granted in July 2024, the airport said in a statement on Saturday. The airport has implemented several initiatives to ensure better passenger experience and smooth processing. The Airport Customer Experience Accreditation is a multilevel programme developed by Airports Council International (ACI) to guide airports towards achieving excellence in customer experience management. The 'level 3' is awarded based on parameters like airport culture, governance, operational improvement, measurement, Customer strategy and customer understanding, it said. *—PTI*

Transport Canada warns AI over crew drinking rules

This was after 'drunk' pilot was held in Vancouver before flying

VANCOUVER, 3 JAN

An Air India pilot was arrested at Vancouver International Airport last week as he was preparing for a flight, with Canada's transportation agency warning the airline that it faced loss of its flight authorisations if it did not comply with rules about alcohol consumption.

Transport Canada said in a statement Friday that the incident took place on 23 December, and it would engage with Air India and Indian aviation authorities to ensure "appropriate followup actions" were taken.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police said the arrest occurred after a "report of concern" involving an airline crew member.

Police said an investigation is ongoing and no further information would be released.

A spokeswoman for the airport said the pilot had been preparing for Air India's scheduled daily flight from Vancouver to Delhi, which was delayed for several hours but later departed safely.

Flight tracking website FlightRadar24 shows that the 23 December Air India flight from Vancouver to Delhi via Vienna was scheduled to depart at 3pm but did not leave YVR until 10.02pm.

Air India did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Transport Canada said in its statement that the Directorate General of Civil Aviation of India had primary responsibility for regulatory oversight of Air India.

The statement said Canadian aviation regulations prohibited pilots or any other crew members from acting within 12 hours of drinking alcohol or while under its influence.

It said airlines could not assign crew who were unfit for duty.

"Non-compliance with these regulations may result in the suspension or cancellation of a Canadian Aviation Document under the Aeronautics Act," it said.

Airlines could also face judicial and other penalties, the statement said. *—PTI*

Flight tracking website FlightRadar24 shows that the 23 December Air India flight from Vancouver to Delhi via Vienna was scheduled to depart at 3pm but did not leave YVR until 10.02pm **PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA**

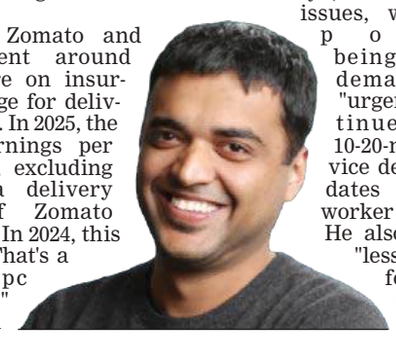
AMID GIG WORKERS' STRIKE

Gig model offers 10.9% pay hike, job flexibility: Zomato CEO

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

Amid the debate on gig workers' salaries and working conditions, Eternal Founder and CEO **Deepinder Goyal** said this model does not pressure riders, and that flexible schedules and welfare benefits make gig work a reliable income source for many. Eternal owns Zomato and Blinkit.

His remarks come at a time when gig workers have been demanding better salaries.



"In 2025, Zomato and Blinkit spent around Rs 100 crore on insurance coverage for delivery partners. In 2025, the average earnings per hour (EPH), excluding tips, for a delivery partner of Zomato were Rs 102. In 2024, this was Rs 92. That's a 10.9 pc increase," Goyal said on X.

He claimed that the 10-minute delivery promise does not pressure riders.

However, his comments drew mixed responses from on X, with many accusing riders of rash driving and violating traffic rules to meet 10-minute deadlines.

The Gig & Platform Services Workers' Union (GIPSWU) last month wrote to Union Minister for Labour and Employment Mansukh Mandaviya, raising several issues, with a key point being their demand to "urgently discontinue the 10-20-minute service delivery mandates to ensure worker safety."

He also batted for "less regulation" for India's gig economy. *—PTI*

Rupee depreciation to slow down in 2026: SBI

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

The pace of rupee depreciation is expected to slow significantly in 2026, after the Indian currency endured its weakest year since 2022 amid foreign fund outflows, trade uncertainty and elevated hedging demand, according to SBI Funds Management.

The rupee fell close to 5 per cent in 2025, underperforming most emerging-market peers even as the US dollar weakened globally.

However, SBI Funds Management's 2026 Outlook projects the currency to depreciate by only around 2 per cent in FY27, with the exchange rate expected to stabilise near Rs 92 to the dollar.

The outlook is supported by several factors. India's CAD is projected to remain below 1 per cent of GDP, aided by strong services exports and subdued oil prices. At the same time, the US dollar is expected to stay on a softening bias as the Federal Reserve nears the end of its easing cycle, a backdrop that has historically supported emerging-market currencies, the report said.

Capital flows could also turn more favourable. Potential inclusion of Indian government bonds in global bond indices, stabilisation in corporate earnings, and the likelihood of renewed FPI equity inflows may ease pressure on the rupee.

Additionally, the rupee's real effective exchange rate has fallen to about 5 per cent below its estimated fair value, improving competitiveness and limiting downside risks.

Looking ahead, SBI Funds Management expects a more supportive backdrop for the currency. India's current account deficit is projected to remain below 1 per cent of GDP, supported by strong services exports and subdued crude oil prices. *—ANI*

- The rupee fell close to 5 per cent in 2025, underperforming most emerging-market peers even as the US dollar weakened globally.

Jefferies predicts recovery in power demand

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

India's power sector faces a critical juncture as demand is set to recover in 2026, reversing a period of weak consumption.

A recent report by Jefferies says the sector saw subdued activity throughout 2025, with demand remaining flat between April and November 2025 due to extended monsoons and sluggish industrial output.

The report notes that excessive rainfall during the monsoon impacted residential cooling requirements and reduced the need for irrigation and pumping in the agricultural sector.

Jefferies analysts observed that "power demand in India is weak in years of above-average rainfall," citing fiscal years 2008 and 2014 as historical precedents when demand rose by just 1 to 2 per cent. Consequently, the firm lowered its demand growth estimate for the 2026 fiscal year to 2 per cent, down from an earlier projection of 4 per cent.

Despite the slowdown, the report expects a medium-term rebound in demand of 5 to 6 per cent. This recovery is linked to normalised weather, increased industrial activity, and the rising penetration of consumer durables, particularly cooling products. Long-term growth drivers also include a 10 per cent capital expenditure compound annual growth rate (CAGR) and the expansion of data centres and electric vehicles.

The stagnation in demand has trickled down to the renewable energy segment, leading to a slowdown in Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) signings. *—ANI*

APPLE'S 2NM A20 CHIP MAY RAISE IPHONE 18 PRICES

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

Apple is preparing for a potential price surge in its flagship iPhones, particularly with the anticipated launch of the iPhone 18 in 2026, as costs for chip manufacturing increase, potentially impacting the company's profit margins. A key driver of this change is Apple's expected adoption of a 2nm manufacturing process for its upcoming mobile chipset, possibly branded as the A20 or A20 Pro. This advancement comes after Samsung's introduction of its 2nm-based Exynos 2600 processor.

Reports indicate that Apple's long-time chip supplier, TSMC, is set to raise its prices for advanced silicon wafers. The cost of 2nm wafers, estimated at around $30,000, is a significant increase from $20,000 3nm wafers currently in use.

Consequently, Apple faces a steep increase in per-chip costs, with estimates suggesting the A20 could reach around $280, compared to the $150 paid for the A19 Pro. This increase poses a dilemma for Apple: either absorb the extra costs or pass them on to consumers through higher iPhone prices. Notably, Samsung is underpricing TSMC, offering 2nm wafers around $20,000. *—Agencies*

Reliance Jio posts strong subscriber growth in Nov 2025

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

Reliance Jio registered strong subscriber growth and maintained its leadership in the broadband segment IN November 2025, says reports from leading brokerages analysing the latest Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) data.

The sector saw a moderate recovery in wireless net additions to 2.0 million from 1.4 million on a month-on-month basis, as the total active subscriber base declined.

Almost all major brokerages, including Morgan Stanley, Jefferies, and Kotak Institutional Equities, said that Jio is the only operator to report a net gain in active subscribers.

Jio added 1.4 million total wireless subscribers and 1.2 million active Visitor Location Register (VLR) subscribers in November.

Jefferies noted that "Jio gained 1.2mn subs, extending its lead over Bharti for 9 straight months" and "Jio outperformed Bharti in active subs net additions for the ninth consecutive month."

While Bharti Airtel added 1.2 million total wireless subscribers, its active subscriber base declined by 1.7 million. *—ANI*

Ministry suggests Aadhaar-like ID for EV battery traceability

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

The transport ministry has proposed assigning Aadhaar-like unique identification numbers to EV batteries to ensure their end-to-end traceability and efficient recycling.

The proposed framework will make it mandatory for battery producers or importers to assign a 21-character Battery Pack Aadhaar Number to batteries, as per the draft guidelines issued by the ministry.

"The battery producer or importer shall have the obligation of assigning a unique Battery Pack Aadhaar Number (BPAN) to each battery that they introduce in the market and the battery they put to self-use." BPAN will capture and store vital information starting from raw material extraction and manufacturing to its usage, recycling, or final disposal, as per the 'Guidelines For Implementation Of Battery Pack Aadhaar System'.

According to the guidelines, any change in attributes of BPAN due to recycling and repurposing shall result in a new BPAN by same or a new producer or importer. *—PTI*

CIEL HR Services raises Rs 30 cr from Zoho, Pegasus

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

Human resources solutions provider CIEL HR Services has raised Rs 30 crore from 88 investors, including the Zoho Corporation, Pegasus India and Standard Fireworks, before its proposed initial public offering (IPO).

In a public announcement, the Chennai-based company said it carried out a pre-IPO placement of 27,27,272 equity shares at Rs 110 a piece, aggregating Rs 30 crore.

This was approved by the board on 17 November, 2025 and by shareholders at an extraordinary general meeting on 28 November, 2025.

Apart from Pegasus India Evolving Opportunities Fund, Zoho Corporation & Standard Fireworks, shares were allotted to investors like Rajashekar Reddy Seelam, founder of 24 Mantra Organic; Prime Securities; KTV Kannan, promoter of KTV Oil Mills and KTV Health Foods; Sri Kaliswari Fireworks; the Pothys family office; AIKYAM Capital; NS Rajan; and Abhijit Bhaduri. *—PTI*

AN INTENSE COMPETITION

BYD surpasses Tesla as largest EV seller

NEW DELHI, 3 JAM

Chinese automaker BYD surpassed Tesla in full-year electric vehicle sales for the first time in 2025, securing its position as the world's largest electric vehicle seller, according to a Global Times report.

The shift in market leadership follows a year where the American manufacturer recorded its first-ever decline in annual deliveries while its Chinese competitor reported significant growth in its electric segment.

According to the report, Tesla delivered 1.63 million units in 2025, representing an 8.6 per cent year-on-year decrease. This performance marked a significant turn for the manufacturer, which previously dominated the global market.

Tesla also reported a 6.7 per cent decline in annual production, which fell to 1.73 million units from the levels recorded in 2024. The company now faces intense competition from rivals such as Hyundai and BYD.

Chinese new-energy vehicle makers were becoming more competitive in production and supply chains. Cui Dongshu, secretary-general of the China Passenger Car Association, told the Global Times on Saturday that these manufacturers "continue to invest in R&D, rapidly advance their technologies, build a complete industrial chain based on China's advanced manufacturing base, and benefit from a well-established domestic market, infrastructure and policy measures that support the industry growth."

The report noted that even Tesla required its gigafactory in China to secure its delivery targets.

The growth of Chinese manufacturers remains supported by an expanding industrial chain and integrated manufacturing bases. *—ANI*

- According to the report, Tesla delivered 1.63 million units in 2025, representing an 8.6 per cent year-on-year decrease.

Govt urges states to speed up farm scheme spending

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Saturday urged states to adopt a strategic approach to budget utilisation, warning that delays in spending allocated funds result in losses for states and hamper the timely release of subsequent central instalments.

Addressing a review meeting with state agriculture ministers, Chouhan said states must ensure funds earmarked for various schemes are spent before March to avoid administrative bottlenecks that delay the effective implementation of programmes.

"If states are unable to spend their budgets on time, it only results in losses for them," the minister said, adding that budget allocations are often held up due to minor administrative and procedural issues.

The meeting reviewed the progress and budget utilisation of central agriculture schemes, including the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (PM-RKVY) and Krishonnati Yojana (KY).

Chouhan stressed the need for prompt verification of eligible farmers under the PM-KISAN scheme, expanding coverage under the crop insurance scheme, and ensuring timely settlement of claims.

He also emphasised the importance of seed and fertiliser availability, their balanced use, and strengthening central-state coordination.

The meeting was attended by agriculture ministers from Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and Mizoram, along with Agriculture Secretary Devesh Chaturvedi, and senior ministry officials. *—PTI*

Asian Games 2026: AFI announces qualifying standards

PHOTO: PTI

CANADA, 3 JAN

Athletics Federation of India announced the qualifying standards for the Asian Games 2026 on Saturday during a media interaction in New Delhi.

The 20th edition of the Asian Games is set to be held in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, from 19 September to 4 October.At the previous Asian Games in Hangzhou in 2023, where India clinched 107 medals, 29 six gold, 14 silver, and nine bronze came in athletics, the most in any discipline.

As per the qualifying standards for this year's edition, male athletes will have to break National Records in 100m and pole vault to be considered for selection.

While the current National Records in men's 100m and men's pole vault are 10.18s (set by Animesh Kujur in 2025) and 5.40m (set by Dev Meena in 2025), respectively, the qualifying mark for the two events is 10.16s and 5.45m, respectively. Qualification marks for a few events will be decided later in the year. "We don't have any data on the (4x100m) mixed relay. So, that is one event that the selection committee will later look at.

There will be Asian Relays and World Relays before this (Asian Games). They will have a look at that and create the qualifying (standard).

It is the same case for marathon walking. In these events, we don't have any research data because this is a new event," said AFI Spokesperson Adille Sumariwalla.

Further explaining the qualification criteria, Sumariwalla said, "The athletes must participate in a minimum of two competitions for the Inter-State and National Open Championships. In total, they must participate in three competitions, including mandatory participation at the State Championships." —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Chopra focussing on rehabilitation of his back injury

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

Star javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra is focusing on rehabilitation of his back injury, which he had suffered just before the World Championships last September, and has not yet decided when and where to start the season, Athletics Federation of India (AFI) said on Saturday. Chopra competed in the World Championships in Tokyo in September 2025 with a back injury, and he finished a lowly eighth with a best throw of 84.03m, a far cry from the season and personal best of 90.23m in May last. "He (Chopra) is taking a break. He is recovering from his injuries. He had two injuries. The focus is on rehabilitation, I think that is the most important thing, not the opener," AFI spokesperson Adille Sumariwalla said when asked about Chopra's likely opening event of the season. "Hats off to him for taking part in the world championships. I have seen his injury, the swelling, and he still took part. We told him, don't do it. He said, 'no sir, I will try. He never said a word like I couldn't throw because of my injury.—*PTI*

Gukesh pulls out of Tata Steel Chess India 2026

KOLKATA, 3 JAN

World champion D. Gukesh has pulled out of the Tata Steel Chess India tournament, set to be held in Kolkata from 7 to 11 January. "Due to personal reasons, D. Gukesh will be unable to participate in Tata Steel Chess India this year," said the organisers of the rapid and blitz event on social media. The organisers also announced that Nihal Sarin will replace Gukesh in this edition of the tournament. The event will see the return of five-time World champion Viswanathan Anand as a player, after being the ambassador over the last few years.—*PTI*

Iyer to join for next two Vijay Hazare Trophy fixtures

MUMBAI, 3 JAN

Having received a conditional clearance from the BCCI's Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru, Shreyas Iyer will be available for Mumbai's next two Vijay Hazare Trophy fixtures, against Himachal Pradesh and Punjab. "Shreyas will join the team here on Sunday, and he will be playing in the next couple of games," Mumbai's chief selector Sanjay Patil said, who is currently in Jaipur with the team. This will be Shreyas' return to competitive cricket after a spleen injury during India's tour of Australia last October. —*PTI*

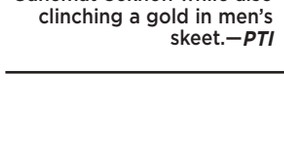


PHOTO: PTI

Bajwa switches nationality to represent Canada

CANADA, 3 JAN

Skeet shooter Angad Vir Singh Bajwa has switched nationality and will represent Canada in future competitions, the 30-year-old revealed through a social media post. Angad shared a picture of his new red shooting vest featuring his name and the Canadian flag on Instagram. Angad represented India in the men's skeet event at the Asian Games in 2018 and the Tokyo Olympics in 2021. He won a gold medal at the 2018 Asian Shotgun Championships. At the Asian Championships in 2019, he grabbed a silver in the mixed team event with Ganemat Sekhon while also clinching a gold in men's skeet.—*PTI*

India squad for NZ ODI series: Gill back as captain

Siraj returns to the 15-man squad, while Pandya is being rested

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

Shubman Gill will return as ODI captain, and Shreyas Iyer, subject to fitness clearance, will be the vice-captain for India's three-match ODI series against New Zealand at home starting 11 January. Mohammed Siraj also returns to the 15-man squad, while Hardik Pandya is being rested.

Gill had missed the South Africa ODI series because of a neck spasm suffered during the Kolkata Test, while Iyer is making his return from a spleen injury he picked up during the tour of Australia.

While Gill returned to action during the T20Is against South Africa, Iyer has not played any competitive cricket since October 2025.Siraj last represented India in ODIs during the tour of Australia.

He has been a regular member of the Test squad while also turning out for Hyderabad in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy and the Vijay Hazare Trophy.

Gill, Iyer, and Siraj come into the squad in place of Tilak Varma, Dhruv Jurel, and Ruturaj Gaikwad. These are the only changes to the squad that India fielded when they won 2-1 against South Africa. Tilak and Jurel did not get a game during that series, although Gaikwad scored 105 in Raipur from No. 4 in one of his two outings with the bat.Apart from Gill and Iyer, other batters in the squad are Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, and Yashasvi Jaiswal. KL Rahul stand-in captain during the South Africa ODIs and Rishabh Pant are the two wicketkeeper-batters. Washington Sundar, Ravindra Jadeja, and Nitish Kumar Reddy are the allrounders while Kuldeep Yadav is the lone wristspinner.

INDIA SQUAD FOR NZ ODI SERIES

■Shubman Gill (capt)■ Rohit Sharma■Virat Kohli■KL Rahul (wk)■ Washington Sundar■ Ravindra Jadeja■ Mohammed Siraj■Harshit Rana■ Prasidh Krishna■Kuldeep Yadav ■Rishabh Pant (wk)■ Nitish Kumar Reddy ■*Shreyas Iyer (vice-capt) ■*Arshdeep Singh ■Yashasvi Jaiswal (*subject to fitness clearance)

The seamers are Harshit Rana, Prasidh Krishna, Arshdeep Sing,h and Siraj. Both Gill and Iyer are expected to play a Vijay Hazare Trophy match each on January 6 before the India squad gets together. Gill missed Punjab's game on Saturday with food poisoning but should turn out against Goa on Tuesday. Iyer is expected to play for Mumbai against Himachal Pradesh in Jaipur on the same day. As for Hardik, the BCCI is managing his workload with one eye on the T20 World Cup starting 7 February. The BCCI's statement said that Hardik has not yet been cleared by the Centre of Excellence to bowl 10 overs in a game. —*PTI*

VIJAY HAZARE TROPHY GROUP D

Pant's unbeaten 67 in big Delhi win over Services

BENGALURU, 3 JAN

India keeper-batter Rishabh Pant overcame a patchy form to strike an unbeaten half-century as Delhi thrashed Services by eight wickets to return to winning ways in a fifth-round Vijay Hazare Trophy Group D match here on Saturday.

Delhi rode on opener Priyansh Arya (72 not out off 45 balls) and Pant's (67 not out off 37 balls) half-tons to overhaul Services' meagre total of 178 all out in just 19.4 overs.

Delhi are back on top of the table with 16 points and a healthy NRR of +0.803, followed by Haryana (16 points, +0.460). Odisha, Railways and Saurashtra are on 12 points each, while Gujarat are on eight points.

This was Pant's second half-century in five games and came after two below-par performances with the bat. The timely unbeaten half-century came on a day when Pant was named in India's squad for the three-match ODI series against New Zealand starting on 11 January.

Delhi had slumped from pole position to fourth spot in the group following their 79-run defeat to Odisha, which was chiefly due to Pant's mixed fortunes this season in the domestic 50-over tournament and the top-order batters failing to fire.But on Saturday, there were no such troubles for Delhi as India pacer Harshit Rana (4/47) and upcoming right-arm quick Prince Yadav (3/28) proved more than a handful for a weak Services batting line-up that struggled to come to terms with quality bowling.

PHOTO: PTI

Brief scores:
Services 178 all out in 42.5 overs (Harshit Rana 4/47, Prince Yadav 3/28) lost to Delhi 182 for 2 in 19.4 overs (Priyansh Arya 72 not out, Nitish Rana 32, Rishabh Pant 67 not out) by 8 wickets. —*PTI*

Blaming Shah Rukh Khan unfair: Atul Wassan

GURUGRAM, 3 JAN

Former India cricketer Atul Wassan believes that blaming Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) co-owner Shah Rukh Khan is unfair and removing one player will not make any difference after the BCCI's directive to release Bangladesh cricketer Mustafizur Rahman from the Kolkata-based franchise's roster.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) secretary Devajit Saikia told ANI on Saturday that the apex cricket board has instructed the IKKR to release Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman. The BCCI's move came after the inclusion of the Bangladesh player sparked a political and public backlash, particularly amid the recent targeting of Hindu minorities in Bangladesh.

Madan Lal on Mustafizur's release

Former India cricketer Madan Lal has backed the Board of Control for Cricket in India's (BCCI) decision to ask IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) to release Bangladesh cricketer Mustafizur and said that the officials understand the situation well and must have taken the right call after following 'thorough consultation.'

On Saturday, BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia stated that the board has directed KKR to release Bangladesh fast bowler Rahman from their squad before the IPL 2026 season, ending weeks of debate over the high-profile signing. Following reports of violent acts against members of the Hindu community in Bangladesh in December, critics voiced their disapproval of the pacer's involvement in the IPL. "I believe whatever the BCCI has done must have followed thorough consultation, keeping public sentiment in mind. They may also have received inputs from the government. Whether it is right or wrong, I cannot say, but the BCCI understands the situation well. —*PTI*

Pakistan submits provisional WC squad to ICC

LAHORE, 3 JAN

Ahead of the T20 World Cup 2026, Pakistan has submitted its provisional 15-member squad to the International Cricket Council (ICC), but has yet to make the list public, a source said.

The source also said that 1 January was the deadline given by the ICC for the participating teams to submit their provisional squads, and the PCB completed the process within the given timeframe. —*PTI*

Padikkal's 4th ton powers Karnataka to a big win

AHMEDABAD, 3 JAN

Out-of-favour India batter Devdutt Padikkal struck his fourth century in the Vijay Hazare Trophy this season as star-studded Karnataka registered an 80-run win against Tripura to secure their fifth victory in Group A here on Saturday.

Domestic heavyweight Padikkal struck a 120-ball 108 as Karnataka made a mammoth 332 for 7 and then dismissed Tripura for 252 with an over to spare for the facile win.

PHOTO: PTI

With two more league games to be played, Karnataka are nicely perched at the top with 20 points, followed by Madhya Pradesh (16), Jharkhand (12), and Kerala (12). Tripura is on eight points, followed by Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan on four points each. —*PTI*

NATIONAL SHOOTING

Army's Ajay Kumar, Karnataka's Jonathan shine

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

Army shooter Ajay Kumar clinched the men's 10m air pistol gold while Karnataka's Jonathan Gavin Antony made a clean sweep of the top-podium spots in the sub-youth, youth, and junior categories to make it a golden treble in the National Shooting Championships here on Saturday.

Kumar finished on top with a score of 241.1, edging out Railways' Shubham Bisla, who settled for silver with 240.1 after a closely-fought final.

PHOTO: PTI

Haryana's Anmol Jain secured the bronze with 220.0.

Haryana's Shiva Narwal narrowly missed the podium, finishing fourth with 197.2, while Navy shooters Aakash Bhardwaj and Ujjawal Malik came in fifth and sixth.

The qualification round saw intense competition, with Ujjawal Malik (Navy), Rahul Serawat (Rajasthan), and Shiva Narwal (Haryana) shooting identical 584, differentiated by 'inner-10' counts. —*PTI*

VILLA BEATS FOREST 3-1 AND CLIMBS TO SECOND

LONDON, 3 JAN

Aston Villa rebounded from its first loss in two months by beating Nottingham Forest 3-1 on Saturday to climb into second place in the Premier League.

Villa captain John McGinn scored twice in the second half, building on England striker Ollie Watkins' long-range opener in first-half stoppage time.

Morgan Gibbs-White had reduced the deficit to 2-1 in the 61st minute, only for McGinn to restore Villa's two-goal cushion after a poor piece of goalkeeping from Forest's John Victor, who raced out of his area in an attempt to collect a ball over the top. McGinn easily rounded Victor and slotted the ball home from 30 yards (meters).

Victor went off injured immediately after the goal. —*PTI*

BATTLE OF SEXES

'Women's tennis doesn't need to prove anything'

SYDNEY, 3 JAN

Six-time Grand Slam champion Iga Swiatek on Saturday said she saw little point to the "Battle of the Sexes" match and that women's tennis has nothing more to prove. World number one Aryna Sabalenka and Australian Nick Kyrgios faced off in a highly publicised and controversial exhibition match in Dubai a week ago. Kyrgios won 6-3, 6-3 with Sabalenka's side of the court reduced in size by nine percent in an attempt to restrict his power and speed advantage.

It bore little resemblance to the era-defining 1973 "Battle of the Sexes" encounter between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs.

Back then, there was more at stake with the nascent women's professional tour, set up by King, fighting for legitimacy and prize money.

"I haven't watched because I don't watch stuff like that," world number two Swiatek said in Sydney, where she opens her season at the United Cup.

"I think for sure it attracted a lot of attention. It was entertainment, but I wouldn't say that it had anything to do with social change or any important topics.

"I think the name was just the same as the one from the Billie Jean King match in '73. That's it. There were no more similarities because I feel like women's tennis stands on its own right now.

"We have so many great athletes and great stories to present; we don't necessarily need to compare to men's tennis.

"Honestly, there doesn't need to be any competition." The Polish star, who is preparing for the Australian Open this month, the only Grand Slam she has yet to win, said the mixed-teams United Cup was a better way to celebrate men's and women's tennis. —*PTI*

United Cup: Wawrinka opens comeback with win

PERTH, 3 JAN

Stan Wawrinka's 40-year-old legs didn't let him down over three-plus hours in his first singles match of a 2026 farewell tour on Saturday.

Three-time Grand Slam singles champion Wawrinka beat Arthur Rinderknech of France, who is ranked 29th to Wawrinka's 157th, 5-7, 7-6 (5), 7-6 (5). The match went 3 hours, 16 minutes. Wawrinka announced in December that this year would be his last on the ATP tour. Ahead of his first match, Wawrinka said he hoped to improve on his current ranking and move back into the top 100 before he retires. His highest ranking was No. 3, achieved when he won the Australian Open in 2014. "I'm happy with the decision (to retire) and feeling at peace with that," Wawrinka said. The United Cup is among several tournaments being played over the next two weeks Down Under ahead of the Australian Open, which begins in Melbourne on Jan. 18. His teammate Belinda Bencic started off the tie Saturday with a 6-2, 6-4 win over France's Leolia, giving the Swiss team a winning 2-0 lead. —*PTI*